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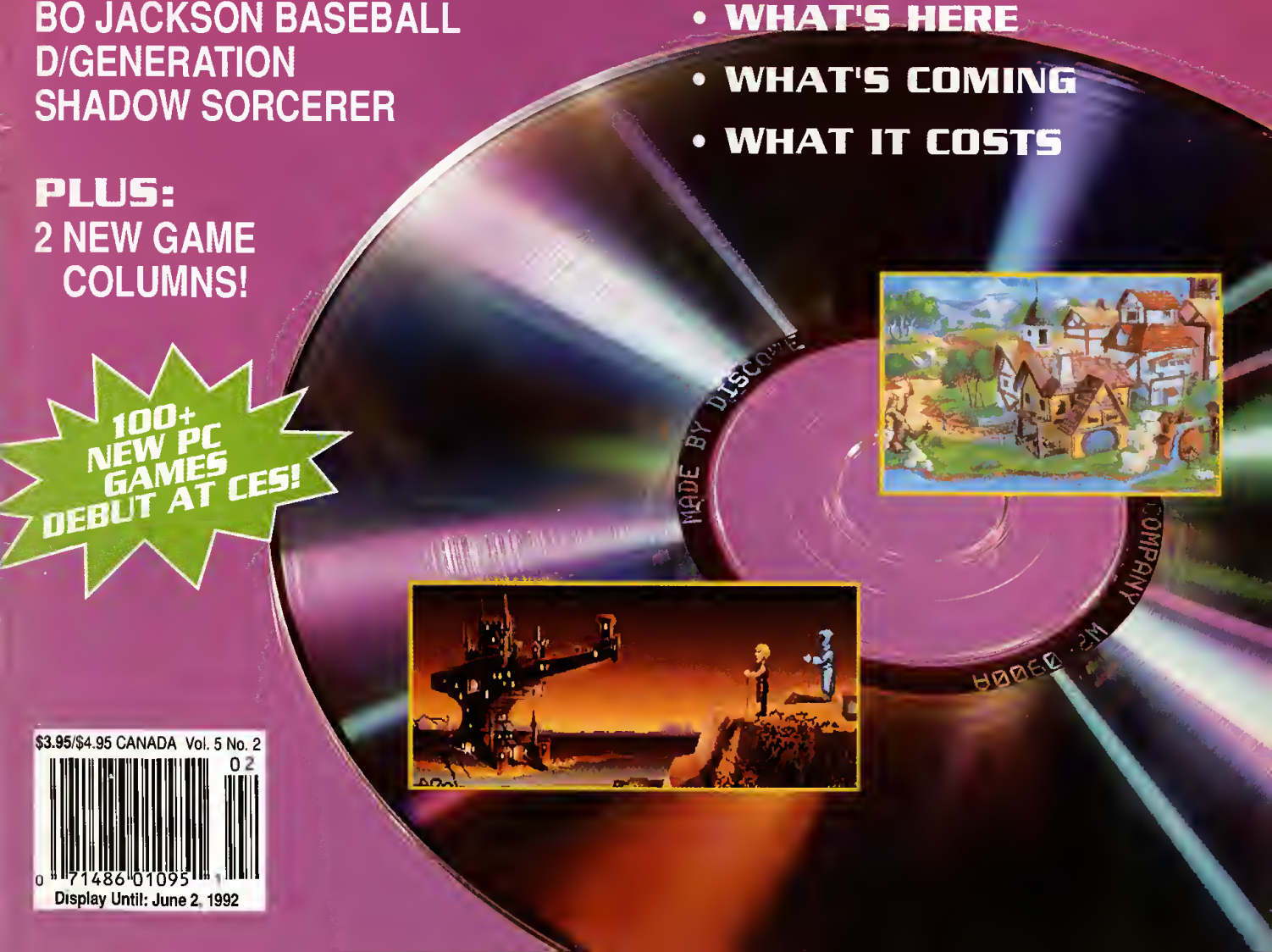

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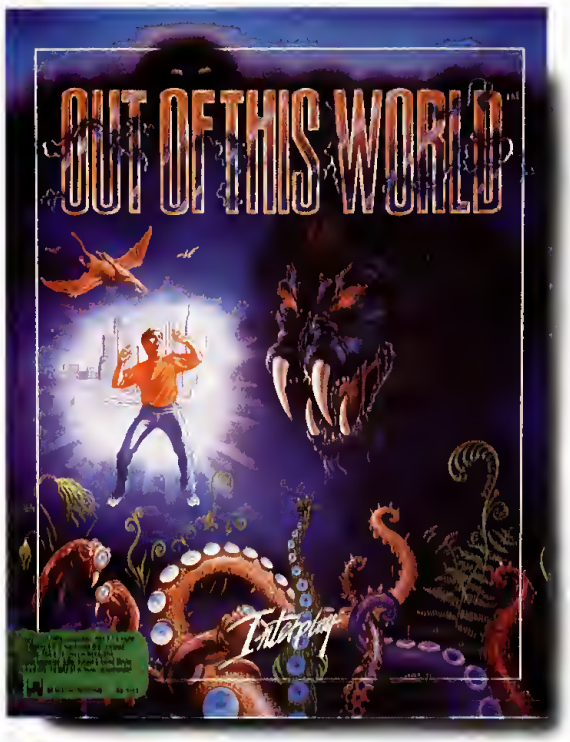

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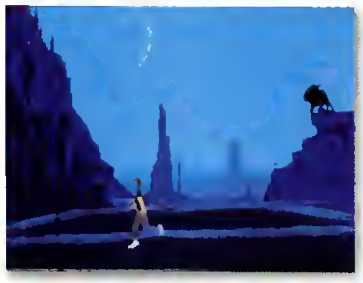

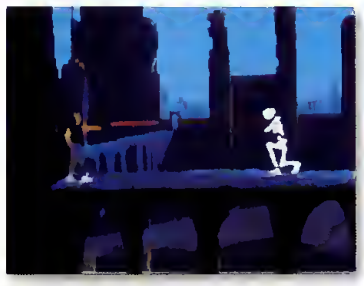

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Photography by Mark Wagoner; game screens from Dynamix (*Aces of the Pacific*); Lucasfilm Games (MPC version of *Loom*); and Sierra On-line (MPC version of *King's Quest V*)

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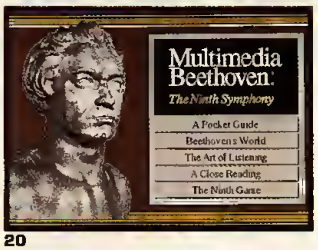

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GAME PLAYERS PC Entertainment

MARCH/APRIL 1992

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MPA

EDITOR'S NOTES

We apologize for any delay in the delivery of this issue. We had a slight blip in the transition from one ownership to another, but we're on course and committed as ever to bringing you the best coverage around in the field of PC entertainment. Our new company name is GP Publications, and, for all intents and purposes, not much else has changed.

There's a lot of excitement in the PC market these days. State-of-the-art hardware is more affordable than ever, software publishers continue to push the envelope to produce better and better games, and the CD-PC connection is finally a reality with new bundlings such as MPC. We've covered a great deal of what's now happening in this issue. Our cover story is a thorough exploration of MPC, and it includes what's here in software support and what's coming later this year.

The annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) is always a great place to see new products and to get a feel for what's going on the market. We made our yearly pilgrimage CES to Las Vegas, and we've got an extensive report starting on page 30.

Even though we're looking ahead, we're not forgetting last year. In 1991, we saw dozens of outstanding titles released. Our annual game awards, for titles released in '91, are found on page 20. If you haven't seen any of these games, check them out. They represent our staff consensus on what games were the very best in their respective categories.

Plans are under way for our May/June issue, and we're arranging some sneak peeks of several exciting summer and fall releases. We'll clue you in next issue. Stay tuned.

Lance Elko
Editorial Director

OOPS!

Our feature "Shopping for Sound Boards," found in *Game Player's PC Strategy Guide: Special Buyer's Guide*, noted that "the Sound Blaster Pro has hampered its compatibility with the Sound Blaster by incorporating a 12-bit rather than 8-bit DAC chip." The Sound Blaster Pro, indeed, includes an 8-bit DAC chip, assuring full compatibility with the Sound Blaster. We regret this error.

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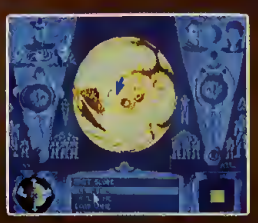

Virgin GAMES

KILLING CLOUD

Some would insist that there are already parts of California where the air is deadly, but the San Francisco of only a few decades in the future is permanently cloaked in a *Killing Cloud* — a noxious fog that enshrouds almost the entire city. The Black Angels, a group dedicated to pure evil, hides behind this cloud, looting what's left of the once-beautiful metropolis.

In this futuristic simulation from **Konami**, you're a cop equipped with the latest in airborne pursuit vehicles, the XB500 hoverbike. In ten different assignments you must fly down through the cloud, round up the Black Angels, and track down the gang's kingpin. And you've also got to find a way to stop the Cloud before the rest of San Francisco's populace chokes to death.

Killing Cloud is a surprisingly deep game, full of subtle details and entertaining twists. Its scope extends beyond the purview of a flight simulator, involving you in all aspects of criminal investigation, from devising an overall strategy to back-room interrogation. Because the designers have taken pains to include as much of San Francisco's topography as possible, *Killing Cloud* is only at its best on a fast computer.

All those extra details means *Killing Cloud* doesn't have the "jump in and go" quality of a simpler game which may only emphasize flying a craft. But if you're looking for a very able simulation of what crimebusting in the 21st century might be, you'd do well to check out *Killing Cloud*.

— Gary Meredith

HARPOON BATTLESET 4 — INDIAN OCEAN/PERSIAN GULF

Because **Three-Sixty**'s superb *Harpoon* game set strives to accurately simulate confrontations that could actually take place in the real world, it sometimes suffers from factors completely beyond its producers' control. Simply put, the world keeps changing, and no amount of design effort can possibly keep up with unpredictable world events.

Only days after we received *Harpoon Battleset 4, Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf*, the Soviet Union announced its dissolution. Immediately, *Battleset 4* seems outdated: one of the set's premises is that "the USSR needs the wealth of this region if it is to survive." And given the ever-changing nature of the Persian Gulf region, there are sure to be other discrepancies in the future.

Does this mean you shouldn't buy this *Harpoon* expansion set? Hardly. This set has several features that *Harpoon* fans will appreciate, regardless of the vagaries of current events. For one thing, *Battleset 4* extends your *Harpoon* naval operations to include the northern Indian Ocean, and expands upon existing forces and features as well. It offers comprehensive information on the fleets of two dozen countries, including the substantial Indian forces. And this battleset, just like the rest of the series, is beautifully and thoughtfully done.

Submarine warfare takes on increased importance here, as does satellite reconnaissance and SONAR (which has been improved in this set). You have land cruise missiles and helicopters at your command as you work through a series of fourteen scenarios and two tactical studies. The scenarios range from large to small, with corresponding differences in playing time.

As you read this, the Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean area may well be the only region in the world for designers of contemporary war games to simulate. Unquestionably, the interest lies with the navies, and *Battleset 4* captures those possibilities.

— Neil Randall

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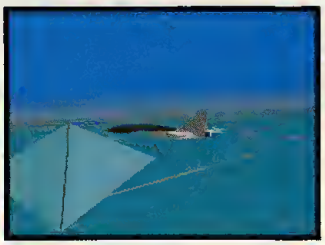
MIG-29 FULCRUM

This is the first simulation ever of the USSR's (well...what *used* to be the USSR) top air-superiority jet. *Mig-29* was designed by U.K.-based **Domark Software**, and is distributed in America by Accolade.

It's billed as a hot simulator, and it is — this baby flies like the proverbial bat out of hell. We would advise all but the most experienced PC pilots to spend a lot of time on the training course before undertaking a combat mission.

Although there are only five combat missions, each one is long, well-planned, and dangerous enough to afford plenty of replay value. The Fulcrum packs a lot of firepower, and you get to deliver it to a gratifying array of targets: gunboats and oil platforms in a Gulf scenario, Harriers in an Arctic dogfighting mission, and a nuclear reactor belonging to a rogue Third World dictator.

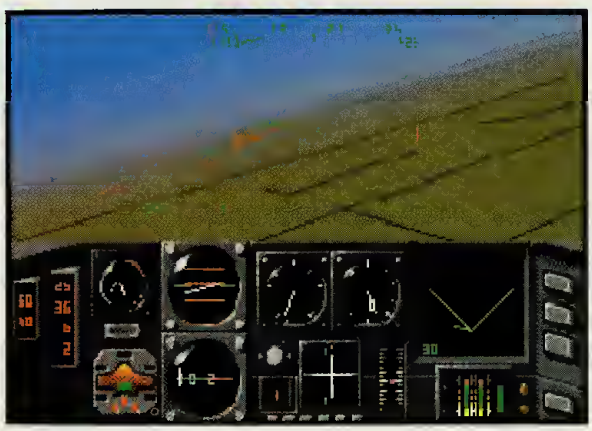
Mig-29 has convincingly realistic flight dynamics, but what impressed us most about this simulation was its imaginative graphics. In the "Blue SeaSprite" mission, which requires you to fly armed recon over a Dallas-class submarine trapped in an ice pack off the coast of Siberia, the vast gray-and-white icescape is hypnotically beautiful. Fascinating, too, is the aerial view of the Great Wall of China, which marks the dangerous part of a mission code-named "Yellow Dragon."



Two quibbles: the manual is all but impossible to read due to the gray-and-white, control-panel background, and we could never get the helmet-mounted display to work properly, a distinct handicap in combat.

Nevertheless, *MIG-29* is a good simulation, especially considering the reasonable asking price.

— *William R. Trotter*



HOYLE BOOK OF GAMES, VOL. 3

The latest entry in this **Sierra** series is subtitled *Great Board Games*, and the six games here are all undeniable classics. Checkers, Backgammon, Dominoes, Pachisi (Parchisi), Snakes and Ladders (Chutes and Ladders), and Yacht (Yahtzee) are each played by Hoyle's official rules (although in most of the games you're given the option to alter certain rules for play variation).

As you'd expect from a Sierra title, the execution in *Volume 3* is topnotch — the graphics shine, the sound and music are good, the interface and menu system are elegant, and Sierra's usual touches of humor are abundantly sprinkled throughout.

Despite the impeccable design, *Volume 3* is less engaging than either of the first two volumes (card games and solitaire variations, respectively). The games here are fun, but they don't require as much thought as those in the earlier volumes. In Backgammon, Dominoes, Pachisi, and Yacht, for example, strategy takes a back seat to the luck of the roll (or the draw, in Dominoes).

Checkers is...well...checkers, and in Snakes and Ladders, every move is determined by the luck of the spin. Additionally, we should note that 286 owners can expect a long wait as the computer opponent ponders a move or the attractive game screens are redrawn.

Your computer opponents (chosen from 18 different Sierra game characters such as King Graham, Mother Goose, and Larry Laffer) vary in skill level, and they provide solid competition along with their own humorous comments during play. *Volume 3* is another classy product from Sierra — just be sure you like these board games before you buy.

— *Lance Elko*

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GETAWAY

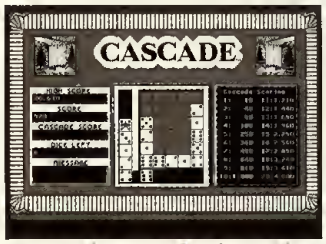
At a time when most PC games are developed with the capabilities of today's top-end computers in mind, it's hard to imagine a product that's designed especially for slow computers with lousy screens. But that's the idea behind **Epyx**'s *Getaway*, a package of six games for laptop computers.

To bypass the limitations of laptops — and to appeal to their likely users — all of the games emphasize strategy over action. Three of the games are traditional: Dominoes (including several popular variations), Solitaire (both Klondike and Las Vegas styles), and Totem (based on the puzzle game Mastermind). The three originals are Cascade (a cross between *Tetris* and Yahtzee), Word Salad (you form words from a grid of letters), and Stuffin the Briefcase (a jigsaw puzzle in which you pack for a trip).

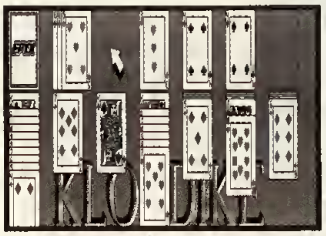
The simple black-and-white graphics can be reversed for easy viewing on any liquid-crystal display, and another option compensates for the squashed graphics on half-height LCDs. As a bonus, there's a System Profile program that evaluates the features and performance of laptop computers.

Getaway is a great travel companion for anyone who needs a break on a long business trip.

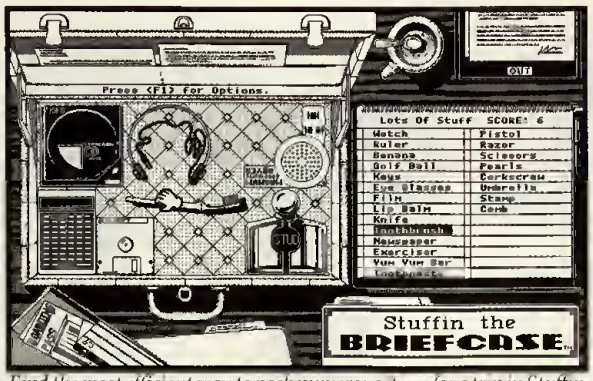
— Tom R. Halfhill



Your goal in Cascade is to form various patterns with the dice that slide down the left side of the screen.



Klondike Solitaire is one of three traditional games in the package. On a half-height LCD screen, the elongated graphics are compressed to normal dimensions.



Find the most efficient way to pack numerous items for a trip in Stuffin the Briefcase.

DRAGON'S LAIR: ESCAPE FROM SINGE'S CASTLE

There's a very good reason that the game manual for *Dragon's Lair* from **ReadySoft** comes with hints for the 15 scenes in the game: the frustration factor is so great and so immediate that you may initially believe that it's impossible to get past the first two or three.

This is a game that's all dressed up with no place to go. On the one hand, you've got absolutely beautiful classical animation from Don Bluth. It's gorgeous! On the other, the game play is like trying to learn to slam dance in the dark — if you eventually do get it right, you're too tired to enjoy the experience.

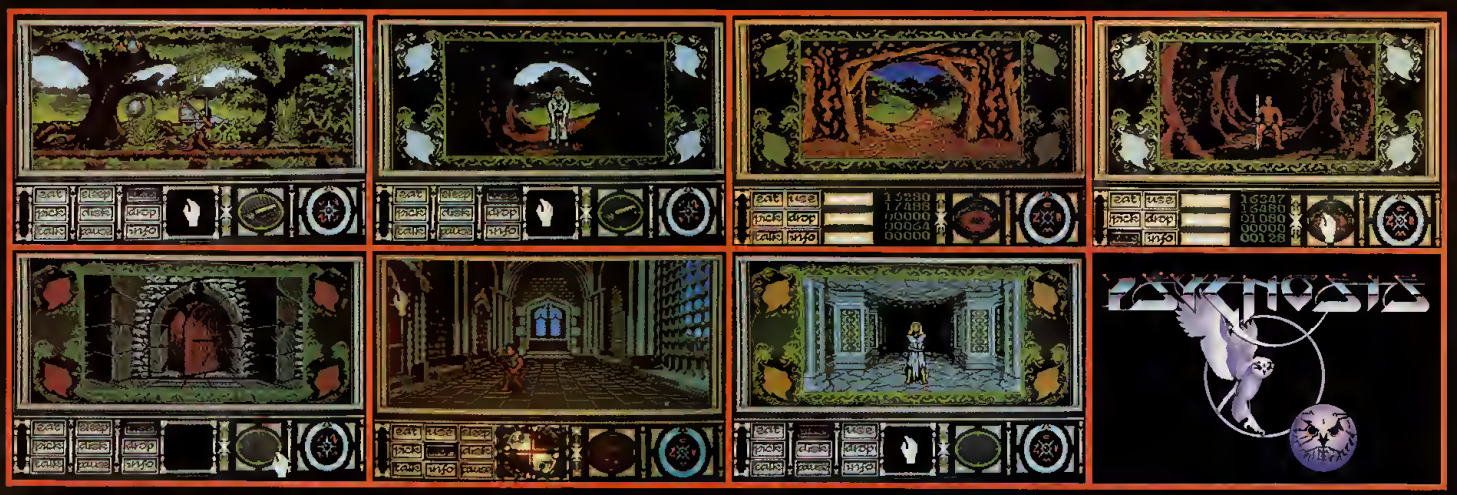
Using a joystick or the keyboard, you help the central character, Dirk the Daring, make one or more perfectly timed movements in each scene as he makes his way toward the imprisoned Princess Daphne. You make those movements over...and over ...and over again until you get the one, two, or three maneuvers just right. Then you advance to the next scene, and do it again...and again and again.

While there may be game players out there who find an enjoyable challenge from this scenario, we've yet to find one among the game players and editors here.

The problem seems to be inherent in the nature of the original game. *Dragon's Lair*, first released in the early 1980s as a coin-operated arcade game, was a major innovation — a laser-disc-based game that employed superb animation. Suddenly, coin-ops were using Disney-style animation! Just as in this PC version, if you made the right move(s), the laser would move ahead quickly to the next scene and a new danger. Music, sound effects, and game play were great in the arcade.

Somehow, it just doesn't seem to work on a PC, even with the stirring AdLib-compatible sound effects and music. Even if you master the moves, you'll probably find there's little enjoyment in it.

— Selby Bateman



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MILLENIUM: RETURN TO EARTH

Here's another game of interplanetary resource management and combat, but with a slightly different twist. This **Paragon** game begins just after Earth has been smashed into a cinder by a trillion-ton object from outer space. What's left is a single lunar colony with a few hundred souls, limited manufacturing capability, and inadequate resources. As colony commander, your task is to bootstrap the human race back into business, with an ultimate goal of terraforming and resettling Mother Earth.

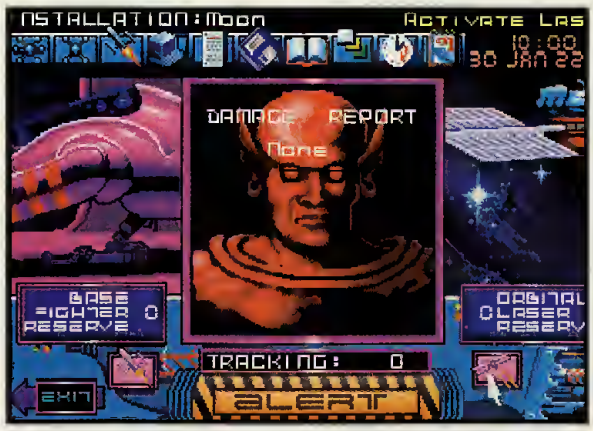
After you develop defenses for the lunar base and get manufacturing operations up to speed, send out probes to the other planets and their moons to locate worlds suitable for colonization, then dispatch unmanned mining drones to the asteroid belt to bring back critical minerals that can't be obtained on the moon. Process these raw materials into more powerful generators, larger spaceships, and colonizing arks. Soon after you embark, you'll find you're not alone in the solar system — a hostile alien race must be fended off, and eventually conquered, before you can restore the human race to its home world.

There's a nice open-ended quality in *Millennium*. You can expand recklessly and take your chances, or do it methodically and doggedly. You have to prioritize and impose strict order on a sometimes chaotic situation in order to consolidate and retain each painfully won gain. The first third of the game is really gripping, as is the climax.

In between, however, comes a long, long stretch in which you do nothing but shuttle cargo back and forth, patiently building up your resources. Even the combat interludes become tedious.

Graphics are splendid, however, and the interface is well-designed. *Millennium* is gratifyingly easy to play, and fans of this sub-genre will appreciate its many virtues.

—William R. Trotter



TOUR OF DUTY: P-38 LIGHTNING

That the Lockheed P-38 Lightning has been mostly ignored by flight simulation designers is something of a puzzle. After all, it was the preferred mount of America's top World War II ace, Richard Bong. Perhaps it's a matter of taste — the Lightning doesn't possess the grace of the P-51 Mustang, or the brutish power of the P-47 Thunderbolt. **Lucasfilm Games** seeks to remedy this state of affairs with *Tour of Duty: P-38 Lightning*. And they chose to concentrate on the European theater, where the contributions of the Lightning were largely overshadowed by Mustangs, Thunderbolts, Spitfires, and Hurricanes.

With *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* as a basis (you must have version 2.0 of this simulation in order to use the P-38 module), you can use the Lightning to fly all the standard missions, special historical P-38 missions, or missions of your own design. The historical missions are especially interesting, and give some insight into why the Germans (particularly ground troops) referred to the Lightning as the "Fork-tailed Devil."

Unfortunately, the same limitations we found in *Secret Weapons* are evident in the P-38 module. The graphics are only average, and flight is quite choppy on anything other than the fastest computers. Also, designing custom missions can be a grand exercise in frustration.

But as we noted in our review of *Secret Weapons*, for anyone who revels in the more esoteric aspects of air combat in World War II, *Secret Weapons Of The Luftwaffe* is the only game in town — and Lucasfilm deserves much credit for rightly adding the unique P-38 to the fray.

— Gary Meredith

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Hey Hotshot! It's 1995 and the Pentagon has just unveiled it's brand new gunship – AH-73M Thunderhawk – and guess who's been selected to put her through her paces? That's right – you.

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Zip up your flightsuit, adjust your sunglasses and control your nerves, 'cause this one makes Nam look like a day at the beach!

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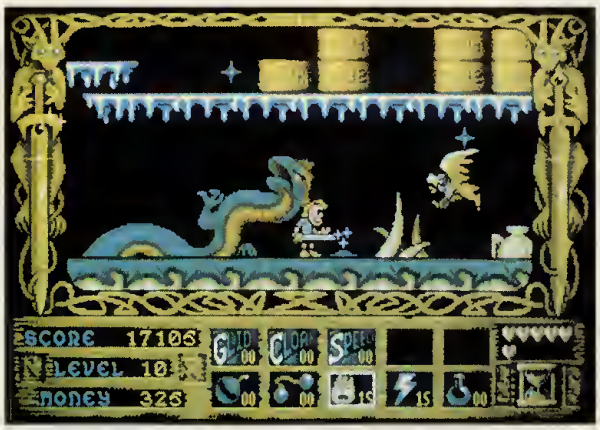
PROPHECY I: THE VIKING CHILD

Games with roman numerals after their titles are becoming pretty commonplace, but it's not often that you see the number "I." The Viking Child in question is a lad named Brian, whose village has been burned to the ground by the evil god Loki. In order to save his people, he must defeat the eight Apprentices of Darkness before traveling to the Halls of Valhalla, where Loki awaits.

Gametek's *Prophecy I: The Viking Child* initially looks like a cute arcade game that would appeal best to younger players, but don't let the cartoonlike graphics fool you. It's doubtful, in fact, that many younger children would have the patience for this game: *Prophecy I* is huge.



The game has sixteen levels, and while any single stretch isn't unreasonably difficult by itself, the levels are very, very long. Brian's life meter steadily decreases over time, so you don't have time to squander carefully navigating tricky spots. But some levels are structured in such a way that if you miss a jump as your hurry along, you can fall nearly all the way back to the start of the level.

Attrition is almost a bigger factor than real skill — a tiny mistake here and a little bad luck there add up to real trouble. It takes near-perfect play to survive, and the game is none too generous with its passwords, giving them out only after every *other* level.

But if you're looking for a game that's going to take you a while to finish, and don't mind playing some levels repeatedly, you could do a lot worse than *Prophecy I*. The graphics are sharp, and play control is surprisingly good from the keyboard. *Prophecy I* may not win any awards for originality, but it's big, nice to look at, and *very* challenging.

— Jeff Lundigran

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

With its blend of quick-change disguises, gadgets, and multiple plot twists, the 1960s TV series "Mission: Impossible" would seem to be perfect for adaptation as a computer game. Unfortunately, *Mission: Impossible* from **Konami** just doesn't succeed in bringing those qualities to the PC.

At a time when interfaces are becoming increasingly user-friendly, the one in *Mission: Impossible* is pretty clunky. You control the game from two sets of screens: the overall Map View of the city and a Detail View of each location. Actions are chosen in the Detail View from a menu bar with a sometimes confusing array of sub-choices.

Although more than one agent can be at a given location, you can't *control* more than one agent at a time. If you're talking to a suspect and you want another agent to follow the suspect when he leaves, you have to switch back to the Map View, select the second agent, then switch back to the Detail View — annoying when you consider that the game unfolds in real time, and the suspect can walk off at any moment.

You also get to select the appearance of your agents — but the choices are digitized photos of what appear to be staff members of Konami and Distinctive Software (the game's developers). Although it sounds like a cute idea, it makes for some pretty homely looking agents — and there isn't a single woman in the bunch.

This isn't in and of itself so awful, but it's symptomatic of a game that needs a little more thought. Distinguishing items you can handle from ones you can't, for example, is mostly a matter of trial and error. And if you choose the wrong response during a conversation, you can sometimes just leave the room, walk back in, and the character will act as if he's never seen you before.

If you're a fan of the show, you're going to have to wait a little longer. *Mission: Impossible* misses the mark.

—Jeff Lundrigan

EXTENDED FORECAST FOR SAN FRANCISCO. MOSTLY CLOUDY WITH A SLIM CHANCE OF SURVIVAL.

The outlook for the City by the Bay in the 21st Century is grim. A toxic cloud has billowed into town, smothering half the inhabitants. You're a hard-nosed cop called upon to soar through the cloud choked streets in your advanced XB500 hoverbike and defend the dwindling population. Especially now that the cloud provides a sinister smoke screen for the evil doings of a rabid pack of criminals, The Black Angels. Your mission is to net the ringleaders and solve the mystery of the cloud that kills.

Receive each of ten daring assignments in the Briefing Room and strategically plant nets and robotic holding units throughout the city. Stoke your hoverbike with machine gun ammo, cannon rounds and a reserve fuel tank, then prepare to engage enemies in dogfights, seize robots and intercept enemy attacks. Interrogate captured suspects for key information. Exhilarating flight simulation lets you select flight or hover mode, forward and reverse thrust, refuel, radar detection, weaponry, multiple views and more. Navigate your way through an urban obstacle course of 240 authentically scaled San Francisco buildings and landmarks. To survive, you'll have to be skilled at piloting, combat, mapping strategies, and sleuthing.

It's time now to don your foul weather gear and shield the citizens from the suffocating smog. See for yourself why the Killing Cloud will take your breath away.

Available Fall 1991 for MS-DOS and Amiga.

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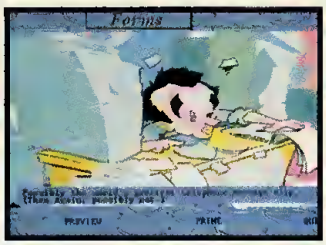
Just what we need during a recession — a set of computer utilities for the office that's guaranteed to sink national productivity to the bottom of the sea.

Larry Laffer, star of countless computer screens and a legend in his own mind, is your host for this shameless set of time-wasters. Want to run a friendly little office betting pool? Trying to figure out where to eat lunch today? Need some worthless sayings to get through the day, or a few lousy excuses for your poor performance? *The Laffer Utilities* from Sierra has all this and more, infused with a smirking sophomoric sense of humor to boot.

There are more ways to kill time here than you can throw a bottle of toner at — wacky fax cover sheets, customizable jokes ranging from clean to the inexcusably filthy, a random "What-To-Do?" decision generator, and even a lottery number generator. It took a truly twisted (and underutilized) mind to come up with so many different ways to waste time, so you won't be surprised to discover

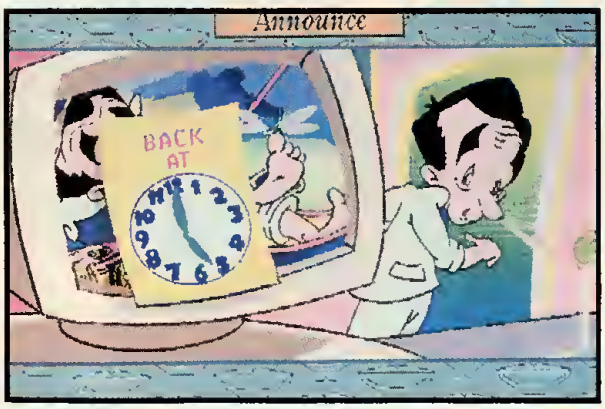


that *Leisure Suit Larry* creator Al Lowe is the *brains* (the term is used broadly here) behind *The Laffer Utilities*.

Actually, there are several useful little programs that somehow slipped into the mix, including a phone database, a birthday list, a program to create forms, and a couple of others. But we won't hold *that* against Larry, Al, or the folks at Sierra. The emphasis is on having fun, and that is handled to perfection.

The Laffer Utilities is indeed the culmination of the computer revolution. It enables us to waste time and lose productivity at speeds far greater than previously thought possible. Now, I wonder where I should eat lunch today...oh well, guess I'll just ask Larry.

—Selby Bateman



HYATT DORADO BEACH — FOR LINKS

Designed by golf legend Robert Trent Jones, The Dorado Beach East course is almost 7000 yards of exotic tropical landscape carved into a par-72 championship course. The PC incarnation, produced by Access Software for its *Links: The Challenge of Golf* sports simulation, is a worthy companion to any PC golfer's club bag.

With the exception of a lone dogleg, the East course's holes are fairly straight plays. The surroundings are a golfer's paradise — palm trees, ocean breezes, and singing birds. (I expected my computer golfer to be wearing Bermuda shorts, but he sticks with more traditional garb.)

Dorado Beach offers some pretty good golfing to go along with this spectacular scenery. The first hole is a straight par 4. Take your driver about 260 yards to set up an easy 9 iron or pitching wedge (if you have the wind) to the green. Hole two is a long par five, over 500 yards. The third hole is a short one, about 175 yards. A five iron should put you on the green — but check the wind before you tee off.

The fourth hole is a straight corridor of about 350 yards between rows of fantastic trees. You could grow old reaching number five, more than 550 yards down a slim peninsula. Even a great drive leaves you little hope of getting to the green in two. Hole 6 features a small green, well-protected by water and a hidden bunker.

Holes seven, eight, and nine continue the challenge of the previous six holes. But it's on the back nine, on hole 13, that you'll meet your greatest test. This long par five with a double dogleg can make or break your game.

The scenery of the *Dorado Beach* course disk makes it a unique and welcome addition *Links* owners. When you feel like traveling to an exotic locale to try your new clubs, this disk can get your there -- and save you the cost of flying or booking a ship's cabin.

— Peter Scisco

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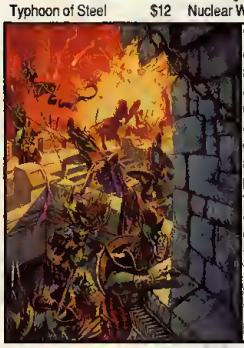

'SIEGE' is a medieval style castle assault game. You are given four castles to attack and defend in a one castle scenario or an extended campaign. Includes historical troops (French, English, Celtic), mythical troops (Elves, Trolls, Giants), siege towers, battering rams, catapults, and oil **$38**

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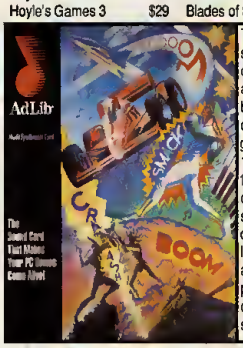

The **'ADLIB'** music synthesizer card by **ADLIB INC** adds sound capability to hundreds of existing PC games. Using its 11 different FM synthesized voices, it can reproduce any sound. The standard audio jack allows you to plug in any pair of headphones, boombox, or bookshelf speaker **$69**

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- Jeopardy 1 or 2 $10
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- LH Team Disks $15
- LH League Leaders $15
- LH Utility Disks $15
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- Links Golf WIN $39
- Links Course 1 -8 Ea $17
- Low Blow $12

'ADLIB GOLD 1000' from **ADLIB INC** is a high quality stereo sound card. It complies with Multimedia PC sound adapter standards. Features 16 bit stereo DAC providing 96db of dynamic range, programmable audio mixer, 20 stereo channels, MIDI input and output, sampling rates of up to 44.1 KHz, stereo input jack, and game port **$199**

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- Madden Football 2 $32
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- Magic Johnson MVP $18
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- ML TD 1982 - 1990 Ea $17
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- ML Football Deluxe $39
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- NG Course 1 & 2 $19
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'WORLD CHAMPION CRIBBAGE' contains all aspects of this classic card game. You cut for first crib, shuffle, deal, discard, cut for starter, play your cards and peg your points as you attempt to skunk your opponent. Includes 2 difficulty levels, variable game speed, and a win-loss record **$24**

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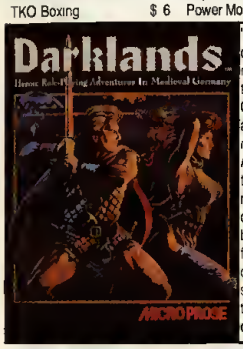
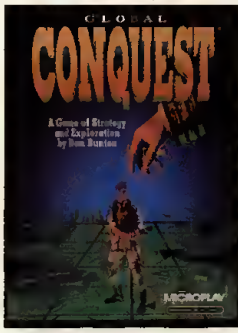
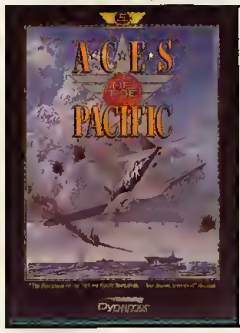


'DARKLANDS' draws upon the lore, myths and superstitions of medieval Germany to create a realistic fantasy role-playing game. A new menu system that provides more traditional rpg options than ever before. Characters fight in real time combat to develop skills that allow them to grow and develop **$39**

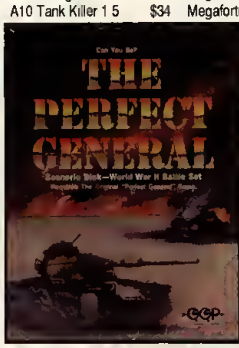


'GLOBAL CONQUEST' is the first strategy game that allows up to 4 players to compete while exploring a **random** world via modem, link, or LAN. You face up to four cutthroat computer adversaries, each with a distinct personality. Features 3 world view sizes and control of land, sea & air forces **$39**



'ACES OF THE PACIFIC' brings all the action of the War in the Pacific to your PC. Fly the A6M Zero, F4U Corsair, F6F Hellcat, and many more. Includes single mission or campaign play for either side, legendary aces to fight, a powerful mission recorder, and an extensive 240 page manual **$42**

'MARTIAN MEMORANDUM' is an exhilarating, fast paced interactive mystery. You are Tex Murphy, a hard boiled gumshoe, who faces murder, deception, and prophecy while searching for the martian memorandum. Features fully animated talking characters and on demand help. **$37**



'WORLD WAR II BATTLE SET' for the Perfect General includes the following scenarios. Pegasus Bridge, Sicily, Guadalcanal, Kasserine Pass, Gafsa, Anzio, Utah Beach, Omaha Beach, Okinawa, Saipan, Gazala-Bir Hacheim, Iwo Jima, Arnheim, Oahu, and Kharkov **$23**

The **'THUNDER BOARD'** is a sound board that is 100% compatible with Soundblaster and Adlib. It reproduces digitized sounds using an 8 bit DAC. Features include dynamic filtering, 11 Voice FM music synthesizer, sampling rate up to 22 KHz, microphone input, joystick port, and a 2 watt power amplifier **$84**

'NEMESIS GO VER 5 DELUXE' is the ultimate computer GO program. With the simplicity of checkers and the complexity of chess, GO is a senuous strategy game. Includes GO MASTER-a basic GO player and tutor, Joseki Genius adds complex corner openings, Tactical Wizard and the Scribbler **$109**

'THRUSTMASTER' flightcontrol system is the only joystick designed to function like those found on modern fighting aircraft. This 5 button joystick runs from a standard game card interface and is fully compatible with older games. While newer titles such as Falcon 3 will take full advantage of its capabilities **$69**

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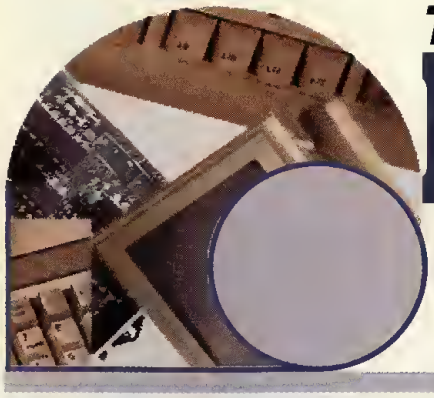


THE MULTIMEDIA Wave

TOM R. HALFHILL

Watch out — here comes another standard! First there was good old MS-DOS, then Windows, then OS/2, then Windows (again), and now MPC, which has something to do with a vague but catchy concept called multimedia. When will it all end?

As new platforms emerge, we, as consumers, must decide which new standards are worth adopting or ignoring. In the case of MPC — which stands for Multimedia Personal Computer — all serious gamers should definitely be interested. Broderbund, Electronic Arts, Interplay, Lucasfilm Games, Origin, and Sierra are just a few of the well-known game companies planning to release MPC titles on compact disc this year.

For instance, Lucasfilm has an MPC version of *Loom* with VGA graphics and 21 talking characters. Sierra has an MPC version of *King's Quest V* with about 50 different voices. Interplay has a speedier version of *Battle Chess* with a CD-quality soundtrack, Super VGA graphics, and a built-in tutorial (each piece explains how it moves). Three-Sixty is planning a special edition of *Harpoon* with 256-color VGA graphics, improved sound, at least one battle set, and possibly a scenario editor.

A CHIP OFF AN OLD BLOCK

MPC is a hardware/software standard announced in late 1990 by Microsoft, Tandy, and IBM, a few months before IBM and Microsoft's famous spat. The decade-old IBM-Microsoft marriage may be on the rocks, but the MPC offspring has survived — partly because of industry support, and partly because the Software Publishers Association (SPA) took the MPC standard under its wing. SPA, a nonpartisan industry trade group, adopted the fledgling MPC Marketing Council, which now oversees the standard.

Tandy's entry-level MPC system starts at $2,799, not including a color monitor.

So what exactly is a Multimedia PC? It's basically a PC endowed with enough memory, processor speed, mass storage, graphics, and sound capabilities to qualify as a multimedia computer.

And what's a multimedia computer? That's a little more difficult to define.

The *ideal* multimedia computer would be a powerful machine capable of handling full-motion, high-definition TV-quality graphics and compact disc-quality stereo sound. It would be just as nimble at manipulating graphics, music, and speech as today's computers are at handling words and numbers. It would be equally at home with spreadsheets, word processing, telecommunications, music composition, graphic arts, games, educational programs, desktop publishing, desktop video, object-oriented programming, regular TV and radio broadcasts, and other applications yet to be invented. And it would be wrapped up in an attractive package that's both affordable and easy to use.

Multimedia might be the latest buzzword, but it's really the next logical step in personal computing. Compare it to the evolution of motion pictures, which progressed from lantern slides to silent films to talkies to wide-screen Technicolor. Unlike movies, however, multimedia computing is interactive — and it requires everyone to equip his own theater.

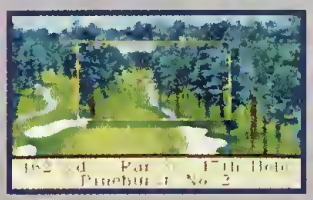
Battle Chess *(Interplay) offers Super VGA graphics, a CD-quality musical soundtrack, and a new on-screen tutorial.*

GET READY FOR MPC!

Loom *(Lucasfilm) has been upgraded with VGA graphics and digitized speech. In all, there are 21 different talking characters.*

To make sure everyone's equipment would be compatible, a standard was needed. And since the ideal multimedia computer is still a few years away, a compromise had to be reached. Not surprisingly, IBM, Microsoft, and Tandy based the MPC standard on the familiar PC platform which dominates personal computing. This takes advantage of the huge PC software library and enables many people to upgrade their existing machines into multimedia computers.

To turn an ordinary PC into an MPC, you'll probably need a few enhancements. Here are the *minimum* requirements set forth in the original MPC standard: an 80286 microprocessor running at 10 MHz; two megabytes of RAM; a 30-meg hard drive; a 3.5-inch, 1.44-meg floppy drive; a fast CD-ROM drive; a VGA adapter; a sound board meeting certain specs; a standard 101-key keyboard and two-button mouse; a joystick port; a microphone input; external speakers or headphones; DOS 3.1 or higher with CD-ROM extensions; and Microsoft Windows 3.0 with Multimedia Extensions 1.0.



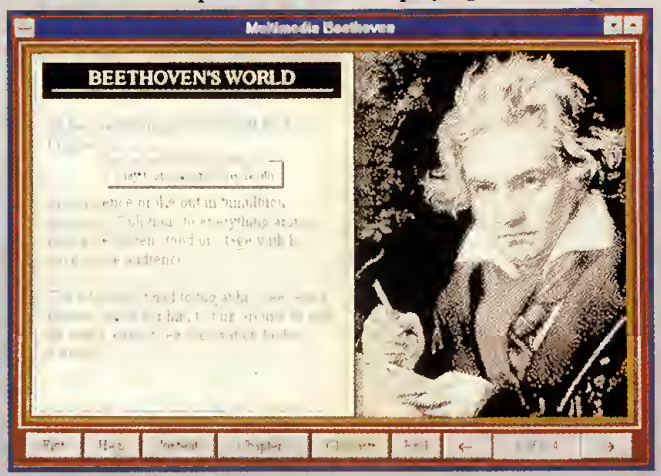
Links *(Access) will have more sound effects and fly-by views of each hole.*

Obviously, this standard falls well short of the ideal multimedia computer. And in terms of processing power, it already falls short of the typical PC system being purchased today—an 80386SX computer running at 16 MHz. So last December, the MPC Marketing Council revised the MPC standard to establish a new base system: a 16-MHz 386SX instead of the 10-MHz 286. All other specifications remain the same.

It's still a conservative standard, given the demands of some Windows software and even some of the latest games (such as Origin's *Wing Commander II* and *Strike Commander*). But it provides a little more breathing room for software developers, while making it feasible for hardware vendors to sell an MPC for under $2,000.

The MPC standard, now embraced by such companies as NCR, NEC Technologies, Philips, Zenith Data Systems, Fujitsu, and Olivetti, gives software developers a lowest common denominator. Developers know in advance that all potential users have computers which meet certain specs.

The MPC standard is also designed to give users the kind of plug-and-play security they enjoy when buying videotapes, audio cassettes, and audio CDs. If you have an MPC, it will run any software bearing the MPC logo, much as any VHS-format VCR will play any tape displaying the VHS symbol.



Multimedia Beethoven: The Ninth Symphony *(Microsoft) is an example of a nongame application that's both educational and entertaining.*

You don't have to figure out whether you've got the right graphics adapter, sound board, or disk drive.

In addition, the MPC standard attempts to solve the chicken-or-egg dilemma which has prevented software publishers from selling their products on a medium they've craved for years: CD-ROM.

Publishers want CD-ROM because the floppy disk situation is simply getting out of hand. It's almost impossible to open a new software

package without five or ten (or more) disks tumbling into your lap. To make things worse, publishers must worry over which kind of disks to include in the box. Many continue to use the 360K 5.25-inch floppies that are compatible with all but the most ancient PCs. Others, faced with the prospect of stuffing 15 or 20 of these disks in each box, opt for the high-density 5.25-inch disks. But some newer PCs, and virtually all laptops, have only 3.5-inch drives. Publishers must decide whether to offer 3.5- or 5.25-inch versions of the same product, or to include both versions in the same package, or to offer 3.5-inch disks if the purchaser mails in a coupon or phones customer service. It all adds up to a tough decision for publishers.

A single five-inch CD-ROM, which holds about 600 megabytes, is a neat and elegant solution. But not many PC users have CD-ROM drives, and few people are willing to buy them until more software comes out on CD. Publishers in turn are reluctant to issue more titles on CD until enough people own CD-ROM drives to create a viable market for CD releases.

That dilemma, plus the high cost of the drives, has stalled the long-predicted popularity of CD-ROM, even though the drives have been available for years. By including CD-ROM in the MPC standard, the industry hopes to prime the pump, while at the same time assuring people that the CD-ROM drive they get will be fully compatible with the software.

Compatibility is important, because not all CD-ROM drives are created equal. If you're a CD-ROM pioneer, your drive might not conform to the MPC standard. Among other things, the specs call for a drive with a sustained transfer rate of 150K per second and an average seek time of one second or less. Some drives simply aren't fast enough.

To further cloud the picture, not all PC software issued on CD-ROM is MPC software. For instance, a recent re-release of Dynamix' *Stellar 7* comes on a CD and is called a multimedia title, but it's not an MPC product. Ditto for Broderbund's new CD version of *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?*. Although you can play these games on an MPC, you'll have to run them under DOS instead of Windows.

Likewise, the sound board you already own might not qualify for the MPC standard. The standard calls for several features — such as a microphone input, on-board audio mixing capabilities, and a Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) — which aren't found on many of the popular sound cards.

START OVER?

The easiest way to make sure your system is fully MPC-compatible is to buy a new MPC system. That's also the most expensive way, but it's worth considering if you have an older PC or XT that's showing its age. MPC systems currently start at around $2,500 and are available from Tandy and CompuAdd, with more on the way.

If you already have a 386SX or faster system, you may be able to upgrade to an MPC for under $700. But don't rush out and buy all the parts separately. To begin with, the MPC standard is very picky. When shopping for a sound board, for example, you probably won't be able to determine whether it meets the standard merely by reading the list of features printed on the box. If you don't see the MPC logo, it's probably not compatible.

In addition, some of the parts you need aren't for sale. Even if you assemble all the hardware, you'll still need the system software: Microsoft Windows Multimedia Extensions 1.0 or later, and MS-DOS CD-ROM Extensions 2.2 or later. At this writing, they're not available separately.

To get these essential ingredients, look for an MPC upgrade kit. One kit that sells for a little over $600 in some areas includes an internal Matsushita CD-ROM drive, a Sound Blaster Pro audio board, and the MPC extensions to Windows and MS-DOS (but not Windows and DOS themselves). The Sound Blaster Pro includes the MIDI port, joystick port, mike input, and audio outputs, plus a SCSI (Small Computer System Interface) port for hooking up the CD-ROM drive. Similar kits built around the new Ad Lib Gold card should be available soon.

Your system may already have the other components you need, though you could probably use more memory. The MPC standard calls for two megabytes, but four megs is much better for any machine running Windows.

Ultimately, it's the software that will make or break MPC hardware. Dozens of publishers plan to release MPC titles this year. Some games will be changed little from the original floppy disk versions; they'll merely be transferred to CD for convenience. But others will take advantage of the roomier CDs to add better graphics, music, and digitized speech.

By late this year, there should be enough software available to turn the heads of dedicated computer gamers. And there will be lots of other interesting applications, too. Only then will we see if MPC becomes a *true* standard — one adopted not just by an industry committee, but embraced by the PC community.

MULTIMEDIA ALTERNATIVES

The Multimedia PC standard isn't the only route to multimedia. Two interesting alternatives are CDTV (Commodore Dynamic Total Vision) from Commodore and CD/I (Compact Disc/Interactive) from Philips. Although MPC, CDTV, and CD/I all use software on five-inch compact discs, there's no hardware or software compatibility among the three systems.

CDTV and CD/I each take a unique approach to multimedia. By omitting such telltale parts as disk drives and keyboards, and by disguising themselves to resemble VCRs, they hope to sneak into the living rooms of people who for one reason or another don't want a conventional computer for multimedia. Both machines hook up to regular TV sets and can also play audio CDs through a stereo.

Although Philips announced its system first, Commodore beat CD/I to the stores by releasing CDTV in mid-1991. Commodore saved time by basing CDTV on the Amiga, the granddaddy of multimedia computers. In 1985, the Amiga was the first computer to introduce advanced color graphics, stereo sound, digitized speech, and true multitasking as standard features.

CDTV is basically a later-model Amiga 500 with a CD-

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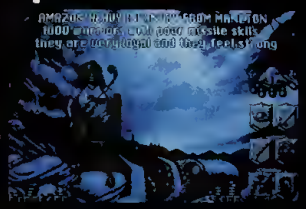

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Commodore's CDTV is based on the Amiga computer.

ROM drive, more memory, and a remote control that doubles as a wireless joystick. Gone are the keyboard and floppy disk drive. All of the standard Amiga interfaces remain, however, so CDTV can be turned back into a full-fledged computer by adding the missing devices — one advantage of CDTV over CD/I.

During the past seven years, thousands of programs — including hundreds of games — have been written for the Amiga. Some are now available on compact disc for CDTV, as well as new applications made especially for the system. CDTV retails for $799 and includes a CD version of Grolier's Encyclopedia and *Lemmings*, a game familiar to many PC users.

The Philips CD/I player, now called the Imagination Machine, was introduced late last year and retails for $999. Like CDTV, it comes with a wireless remote "thumbstick" and is designed to play a wide range of games and educational programs. With more than 16 million colors and full-motion video, it's capable of some amazing graphics. One example is *ABC Sports Golf: Palm Springs Open* from Philips Interactive Media. Thanks to actual video footage of real golfers and commentary by ABC sportscasters, it's almost like watching golf on TV — except you have control over the golfer.

Philips' CD/I player is called the Imagination Machine.

Gamers will also be interested to know that CD/I is software-compatible with Nintendo's forthcoming CD player for the Super NES. That means CD/I owners will be able to play all the Nintendo CD games that will probably start appearing late this year or early in 1993.

MPC GAMES FOR '92

Here's a sampling of MPC games now available or scheduled for release this year. Some major companies, such as Accolade, Electronic Arts, and MicroProse, plan to release MPC games but had not announced their titles when this issue went to press.

Access: *Links* with enhanced graphics, new aerial views of the holes, more sound effects, and possibly a female golfer.

The MPC version of Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detect-ive, *by ICOM Simulations*

Broderbund: Initial titles are intended for children — *Just Grandma & Me* (based on a book by popular children's author Mercer Mayer) and *Arthur's Teacher Troubles*.

ICOM Simulations: *Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detective* with improved VGA graphics and smoother animation. More titles are planned for this summer.

Interplay Productions: a faster version of *Battle Chess* with Super VGA graphics, on-screen tutorials, and a CD-quality soundtrack.

Lucasfilm Games: *Loom* with VGA graphics and digitized speech for all 21 characters; *Monkey Island 2*; and *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis*.

Maxis: *Sim City* and *SimEarth*.

Origin Systems: Two titles with enhanced features are planned for this fall. In the meantime, Origin has licensed some existing titles to The Software Toolworks, including *Wing Commander Deluxe* (with the *Secret Missions 1* and 2 disks included on the CD); *Wing Commander* and *Ultima VI* on a single CD; and *Ultima I* through *Ultima VI* on a single CD.

Sierra's MPC version of King's Quest V

Sierra On-line: *King's Quest V: Absence Makes the Heart Go Yonder* with about 50 talking characters; *Mixed-Up Mother Goose*; *Jones in the Fast Lane*; *Leisure Suit Larry I*; and *Space Quest IV*.

The Software Toolworks: In addition to the titles licensed from Origin, look for an MPC version of *Chessmaster 3000*.

Three-Sixty: *Harpoon* with 640 x 480-pixel, 256-color graphics, improved sound effects, at least one battle set, and possibly a scenario editor.

Tiger Media: Two installments in a series of murder mysteries called Airwave Adventures — *The Case of the Cautious Condor* and *Murder Makes Strange Bedfellows*. Both games have a look inspired by the adventure comics of the 1930s and '40s.

GP

Three Sixty's Harpoon *for the MPC*

THE MOST HIGHLY RATED GAME IN FOOTBALL.

For John Madden, "Football's a game of ratings and matchups." That's why John Madden Football™ II captures all the subtle nuances, all the personality of the game itself. You'd expect that with up to 8 ratings per player, 35 players per team, 28 pro caliber teams, plus an All-Madden squad.

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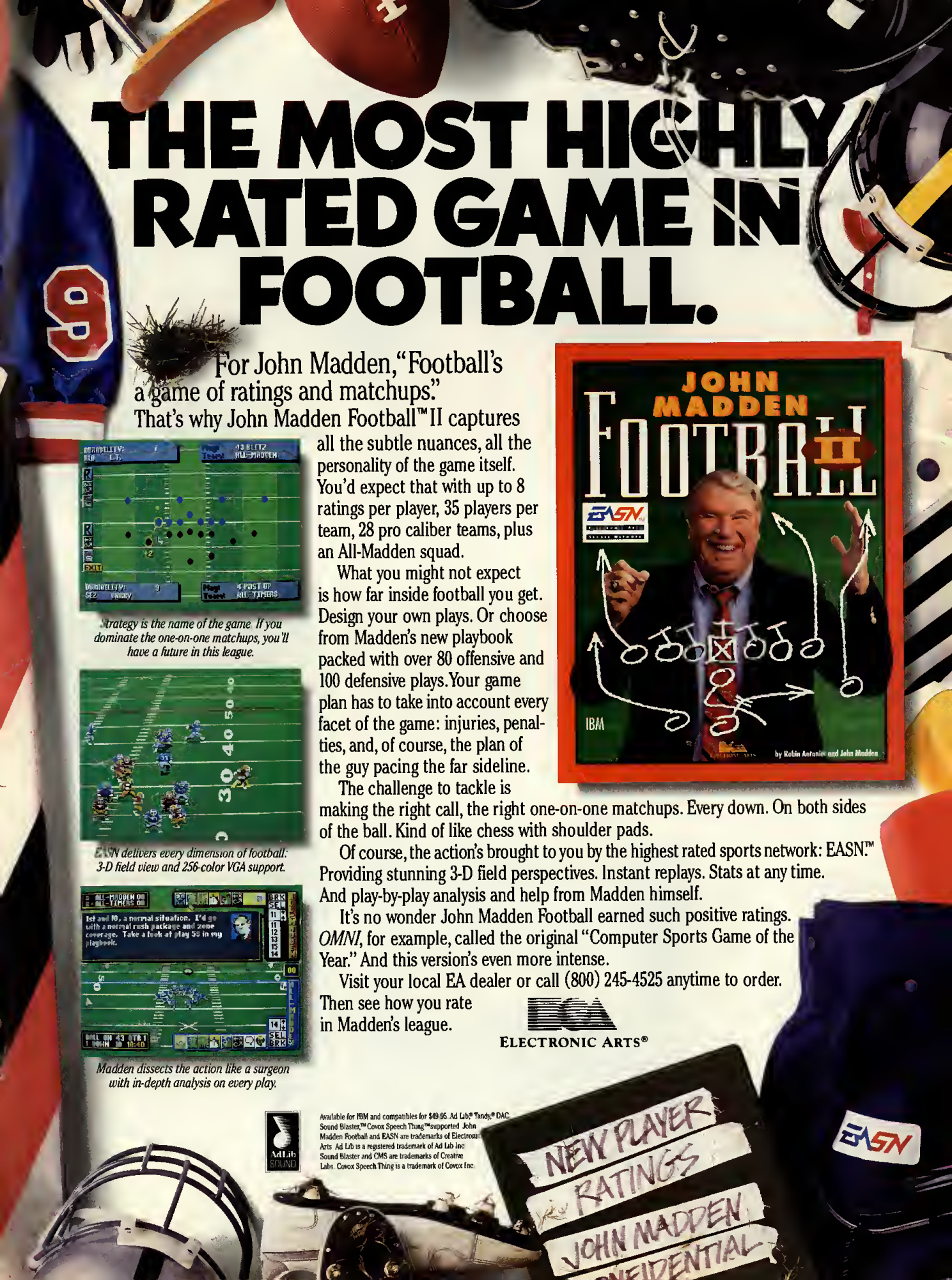
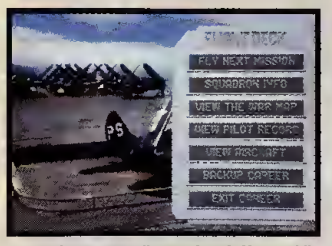


ACES OF THE PACIFIC

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

The Pacific Theater of War certainly offers fertile raw material for flight simulators. Just think of the range and variety of aircraft that participated: the agile Japanese Zero, the plodding but heroic Dauntless dive bomber, the graceful gull-winged Corsair — the list goes on and on. But despite the intriguing possibilities, no one has yet marketed a Pacific War aerial simulation.



Aces lets you fight the full Pacific campaign from either the Japanese or the American side.

Dive-and torpedo-bombers have active tail-gunner positions.

Until now, that is.

At the recent Winter CES, we were given a sneak preview by **Dynamix** of its forthcoming *Aces of the Pacific*, and it proved to be one of the most exciting programs at the show.

Aces is the dream project of programmer Damon Slye, whose previous credits include the cult classic *Stellar 7*, *A-10 Tank Killer*, and last year's phenomenally successful *Red Baron*. While *Aces* will utilize the same basic engine as *Red Baron*, Slye's new design incorporates many refinements and some improvements suggested by the reviews of the earlier product, such as greatly enhanced ground detail.

Players will be able to fly or fight against more than 30 Japanese and American aircraft. *Aces* will offer a truly vast "campaign mode" which starts with Pearl Harbor and continues to an apocalyptic climax featuring the *kamizake* attacks off Okinawa in 1945. (Slye actually wants to go *beyond* 1945: a future expansion disk will cover a "what-if?" 1946 campaign against the Japanese home islands, with American F-80's, Sky Warriors, and Japanese copies of the German ME-262).

The desktop pilot can test his skills in head-to-head duels with actual aces, such as the legendary "Pappy" Boyington, or he can participate in such desperate and far-flung battles as Midway, the Coral Sea, and the Solomons campaign. Torpedo attacks and anti-ship strikes will form a major component of the simulation.

Game Players editors tried their hand at a nighttime strafing attack on a destroyer. To describe the graphics as "impressive" would be a considerable understatement: a velvet sky with the Southern Cross burning high above...the dark outlines of islands looming below...the wake of the target ship as it takes evasive action...streams of tracers crisscrossing in midair ...humongous water spouts where fire struck the sea...and on the horizon, a mortally stricken carrier trailing a giant pillar of roiling smoke.

Anti-shipping strikes, especially torpedo attacks, play a major part.

Hellcats vs. Zeros — now you can learn what these dogfights were like.

Both aircraft and ground detail are considerably more enhanced than those in Red Baron.

Aces of the Pacific not only fills a void in the category of air-combat simulations, it looks to be even better than *Red Baron*. Dynamix hopes to have *Aces* on the market in March.

GP

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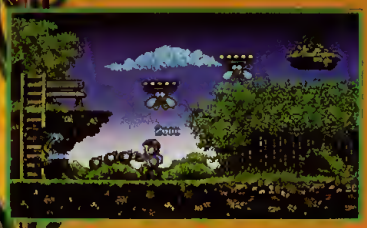
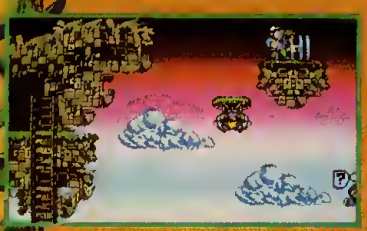
FOR THE AMIGA AND IBM PC





Screen shots shown are from the Amiga version of the game.

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A REPORT FROM THE WINTER CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW

LANCE ELKO AND WILLIAM R. TROTTER

You'd never know there was an economic recession if you were at the Winter CES in Las Vegas this past January. While show attendance was down about 25% from the usual 100,000 mark, and some large players, such as Sony, were absent, there was a tremendous array of new products introduced by computer entertainment software companies. And many of these companies announced significant growth in 1991 — some even broke old sales records.

We managed to get a look at nearly all of the announced titles, and to chat with most of the entertainment software publishers at the show. Here's a first-hand report on what titles you can look for in the months ahead. Because of space restrictions, we have omitted a few products — look for follow-up information in the "PC News" section of our next issue.

JACK NICKLAUS: SIGNATURE EDITION

Accolade: Coming this spring is *Star Control II: The Ur-Quan Masters*. This sequel, featuring beautifully rendered fractal graphics, combines role-playing and action. Also shown were *Road & Track Presents: Grand Prix Unlimited*, a race-driving simulation with a course architect module; *Jack Nicklaus Golf & Course Design: Signature Edition*, a 256-color VGA links simulation that includes digitized male and female golfers, a course editor, and the digitized swing of Nicklaus himself; and *Snoopy's Game Gallery*, a collection of puzzles featuring characters from the *Peanuts* comic strip. Both *Grand Prix* and *Nicklaus* are scheduled for a spring release. *Snoopy* is under development.

ASCIIWare: This new line of PC software from videogame publisher ASCII Entertainment debuts with *SpellCraft: Aspects of Valor*, an FRP with an emphasis on a new magic creation system. The 10-meg, 256-color VGA game promises to be quite deep (40 to 100+ hours of estimated play time).

Broderbund: Delving into the next wave of PC technology,

HEAVEN AND EARTH

Broderbund showed *Just Grandma and Me*, the first title in its MPC-based *Living Books* series. The animated story, based on Mercer Mayer's best-selling book of the same name, is truly interactive, and must be seen to be believed. Much to Broderbund's credit, *Just Grandma*, the first of four *Living Books* titles to be released this year, will be selling for a surprisingly low $49.95. This product is a dazzling example of the next generation of PC entertainment.

Also on display was Broderbund's upcoming CD-ROM version of *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?*, impressively enhanced to take advantage of its new format.

Capstone: This Miami-based company announced its recent acquisition of PC Globe, and showed several new additions to its line-up of movie-based software. These included *The Taking of Beverly Hills*, *Home Alone II*, and *An American Tail*. Also on display was an intriguing role-playing game based on Stephen King's *The Dark Half*.

Cineplay: This ambitious new company, which combines the talents of veteran game designer Kellyn Beck and the world-famous Claymation Studios, demonstrated a new animation program that uses "spline" technology, which we found exciting.

Disney Software: Many of Disney's '91 titles were mildly disappointing, but after a look at its three new titles, it's obvious that they've done their homework. All three are highly impressive.

Heaven and Earth, the first

title to be released under Disney's new Buena Vista label (created to appeal to more mature gamers) is a graphically stunning collection of intriguing puzzle games from the designers of *Ishido* and *Shanghai*. *Stunt Island: The Flying and Filming Simulation*, due out last year, evidently went back to the drawing board — and is all the better for it. It's a deeper

STUNT ISLAND

and far more attractive program than the version we saw last summer. *Coaster* lets you design your own roller coaster and then — hold your breath — ride it. The design/build module looks easy to use, and the ride is from a first-person, 3-D perspective. *Coaster*, a great idea for a simulation, looks like it, too, could be a real winner.

Dynamix: Damon Slye's new air-combat simulation, *Aces of the Pacific*, was a knockout (see sneak preview elsewhere in this issue). Also on view were tantalizing glimpses of a pinball simulation for Windows.

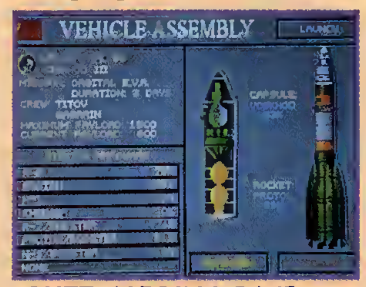
Electronic Arts: A new basketball simulation (tentatively titled *Michael Jordan Flight*) uses full-motion video technology to create sensationally lifelike 3-D effects. Named after one of America's most-decorated squadrons, *Heroes of the 357th* (spring release) puts game players in the cockpit of the P-51 Mustang. The graphics looked great, and there was a nice variety of missions.

Birds of Prey, an *Empire*-like aerial campaign game, features 40 different aircraft, and will be available this spring. Back down to earth, but every bit as hot, was *Car and Driver*, a high-performance driving simulation designed in conjunction with the magazine of the same name. A classic is updated in *Populous II: Trials of the Olympian Gods*, which should be in the stores by the time you read this, as should *Powermonger*, an elaborate strategy game of tribal conquest. Also available now from EA is *John Madden Football II*, and a PC version of the popular arcade game, *Rampart*.

Also scheduled for spring release is *The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes*, a graphic mystery that evokes, in rich detail, the world of Victorian London.

GameTek: A new FRP developed by England-based Imagitec, *Daemonsgate I: Dorovans Key*, was announced by GameTek. *Daemonsgate* features a design twist: non-player characters do not exist as potential victims to be killed, but rather as intelligent inhabitants of their world, continuing to develop off-screen and consequently affected by player actions.

Also new from GameTek are *Humans*, a lighthearted adventure about Stone Age humans whom you must assist in the discovery of fire and the wheel, and *Gadget Twins*, a two-player action/adventure game in which complicated gadgets and mechanical devices must be used to recover a stolen gem. All three titles are scheduled for spring release.



BUZZ ALDRIN'S RACE INTO SPACE

Interplay: Astronaut Buzz Aldrin was on hand to launch *Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space*, which challenges the player to manage either the Soviet or American space programs from 1957 to 1977. Aldrin swears the program is authentic, and it certainly seems to be. This high-flying simulation debuts in late spring.

Available now is Interplay's new MPC version of its classic *Battle Chess*. Lots of MPC versions were talked

CHAMPIONS

about at CES, but this one was actually *there* and it looked great. Also available now: *Out of This World*, an action/adventure which hurls players into another dimension, filled with monsters and traps, armed only with their wits. This game looked extremely challenging, and its fast-moving cinematic graphics were top-notch.

Konami: This videogame giant continues its thrust into the PC market with a second wave of 11 new titles announced at CES. *Champions*, the long-awaited RPG from Hero Games that lets you create your own comic-book superhero, is *still* delayed, with no firm release date in sight; the good news is that we saw a lot more of it this time, and it looks wonderful. Konami displayed a new football game, entitled simply *NFL*, which looks promising.

Konami announced a new publishing arrangement with Renegade, home of the famed Bitmap Brothers. Results? Three splendid-looking new arcade/action titles: *The Chaos Engine*, *Gods*, and *Magic Pockets*.

Reach for the Skies, an authentic-looking Battle of Britain simulation that was originally announced by Activision, will finally reach these shores via Konami's arrangement with Mirrorsoft.

CONQUEST

Other Mirrorsoft titles include the *Populous*-like simulation *Mega lo Mania*, and an ambitious fantasy role-player called *Legend*. We were especially intrigued by *Utopia*, a simulation which challenges you to create the perfect society.

From Konami's partnership with Gremlin Graphics comes The Movie Tie-In That *Had* To Happen: a graphic adventure based on *Plan Nine From Outer Space*. How well the insanity of the Worst Movie Ever Made will translate to the monitor is debatable, but Konami certainly has captured the *look* in this program.

Legend: Having changed its distribution affiliation from MicroProse to Accolade prior to CES, Legend showed bits and pieces of *Gateway*, an interstellar adventure based on Frederik Pohl's Heechee science fiction series of books. *Gateway* sports a look quite different from Legend's earlier titles, *Timequest* and the two *Spellcasting* games.

Lucasfilm Games: Behind closed doors, the folks at Lucasfilm demonstrated their impressive new sound system, *i*MUSE (*I*nteractive MUsic and Sound Effects). *i*MUSE is a proprietary system used in the development of Lucasfilm games in which the musical score and sound effects change, sometimes quite subtly, according to user choices during game play. For example, if the player decides to enter a graveyard, the music will segue into a more foreboding theme as the player enters the cemetery. The musical transitions are fluid, intelligent, and highly effective, providing a new dimensionality for the player. *i*MUSE is used in Lucasfilm's two newest titles, *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis* and *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* (see feature article elsewhere in this issue).

A new CD-ROM version of *Loom* with greatly enhanced sound, music, graphics, and animation, was shown. It was planned for shipment in February. CD-ROM versions of *Fate of Atlantis* and *Monkey Island 2* are planned for release later this year.

In response to consumer demand, Lucasfilm is aiming for summer release of a *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* "Tour of Duty" disk for the P-80 "Shooting Star."

Maxis: *Sim City* fans will be interested in *A-Train*, the latest urban simulation from Maxis. Based on a Japanese game titled *Take the A-Train III*, it casts you in the role of a mass-transit czar who's trying to untangle freeway traffic by constructing an urban rail system. The DOS version is due out in March, with a Windows version to follow later in the year. Maxis also expects to release Windows versions of *Sim City* and *RoboSport* in March, and a Windows version of *SimAnt* by next Christmas.

MECC: *The Secret Island of Dr. Quandary*, a new learning game from this respected educational software publisher, was shown at CES. For ages 8 and up, *Dr. Quandary* is a fantasy adventure that features brain teasers and three skill levels. We were impressed by the 256-color VGA graphics and by the wide array of clever games. It should be available by the beginning of March.

MicroLeague Sports: With representatives on hand from the USA Today Sports Center, MicroLeague announced the signing of a new exclusive marketing agreement with the Sports Center. The agreement lets MicroLeague players download stats on a daily basis for use in MicroLeague games. MicroLeague also announced that it was bringing VGA digitized graphics into its games. Four MicroLeague/USA Today game editions — baseball, football, basketball, and hockey — were announced for release at the start of each sport's season in '92, and arcade-action versions of each of the four sports are in the works.

GREENS

MicroPlay: This U.K. line of MicroProse Software is bringing out two new titles this spring. *A.T.A.C.* is a futuristic strategy game in which world peace and unity are threatened by drugs. The player leads a paramilitary task force equipped with four F-22s. Dan Bunten, who designed the popular military strategy game *Command HQ*, is following up with *Conquest*. This game is conceptually similar to *HQ*, but offers a bigger environment and several new features. *Conquest* includes a modem option for up to four players on two computers.

MicroProse: The biggest rollout for MicroProse at CES was undoubtedly *Darklands*, the company's first-ever FRP. Set in 15th-century medieval Germany, the game appears even bigger and more graphically detailed than what we saw from an earlier look. Elements of historical realism are used in game play — witches worship the devil, people pray to saints for miracles, etc. *Darklands* is slated for April release.

Another first announced by MicroProse was a golf simulation. *Greens* features six different courses, ten game

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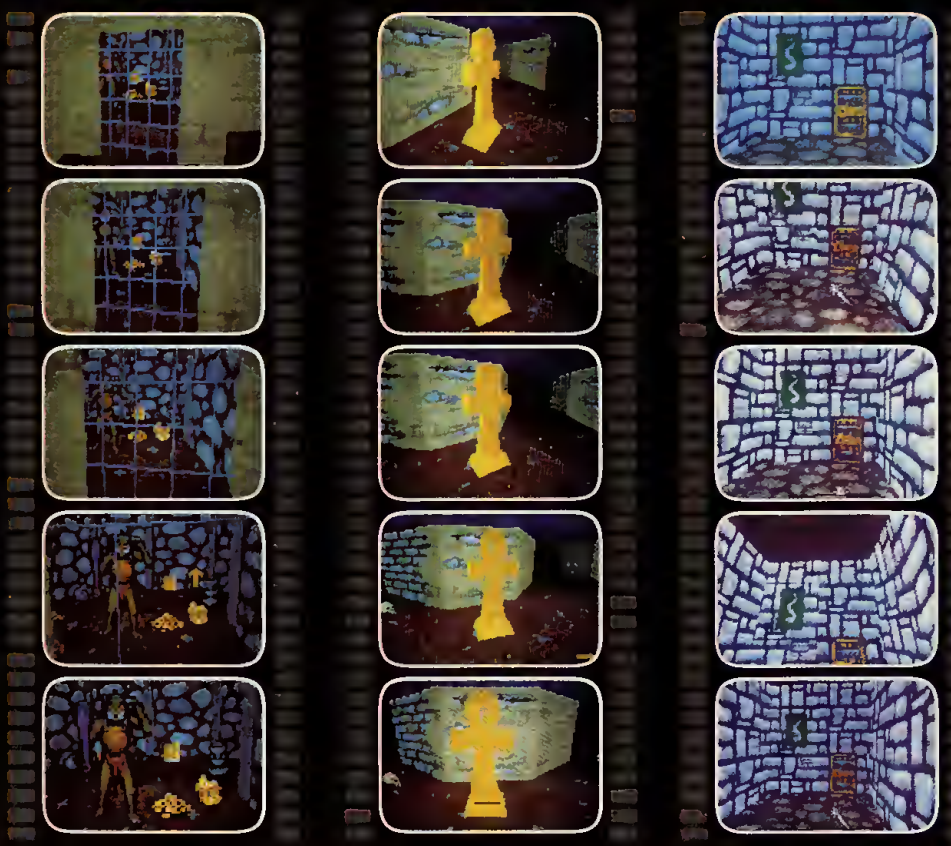

You won't believe your eyes.

Some games can't be showcased with a few screen shots and some descriptive text. *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss* –a game of action, motion and movement – is one of them. We hope this attempt to capture the excitement of the Underworld sends you running to a software store for a look at our demo. Because only there can you truly experience this incredible journey.

Full screen view

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types, and a full handicap system. Game types range from singles to 18-, 36-, and 72-hole tournaments, and players go head-to-head against eight ranked computer opponents or against a human player. *Greens* should debut this spring.

World Circuit, a Grand Prix racing simulation, features 16 championship circuits and 25 competing cars. The game includes a variety of skill levels and full use of pit stops.

WORLD CIRCUIT

A new combat flight simulator, *B-17 Flying Fortress*, recreates WWII missions over Europe, and pits the player against Nazi war planes. The game offers 25 daytime missions over occupied Europe, and gives the player control over ten crew members. Look for it in the late spring.

SEA ROGUE

F-15 Strike Eagle III was on display, although there's not much we can offer about it — the simulator is very early in development (available later in the year). The few scenes we saw, however, featured state-of-the-art graphics.

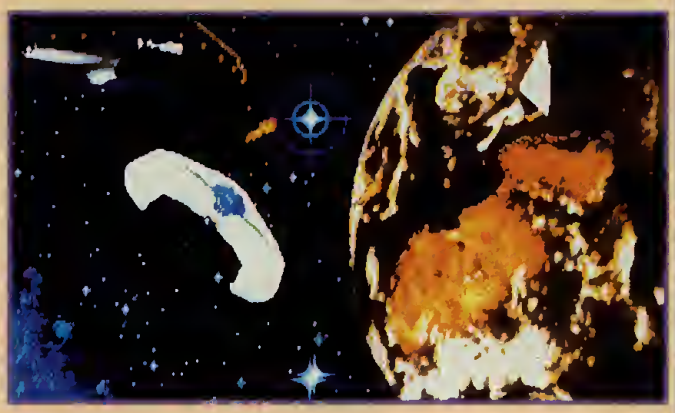
Another new spring title from MicroProse is *Sea Rogue*. Developed by Software Sorcery, this role-playing undersea adventure lets the player search for historically and geographically accurate sunken treasure. The player starts as owner of a jerry-rigged scow and, if successful, progresses to commander of a high-tech undersea probe. More than 270 historical shipwrecks, including *The Titanic* and *The Bismarck*, can be found.

We also had a sneak preview of a space adventure in progress (working title: *Johnny Crash*). The peek was enough to tell us that MicroProse is very serious about getting some market share in areas it has traditionally ignored.

Millennium: Slated for late-spring release is *Global Effect*, an off-beat global strategy game with an ecological slant.

Mindcraft: The many fans of *Castles* will surely want to check out *Siege*, in which the player defends or assaults a variety of realistic, or fantasy-based, fortresses. *Siege* should be available this March.

New World Computing: Now available is *Planet's Edge*, New World's first sci-fi role-playing game. We were impressed by both graphics and depth-of-play in this epic-sized adventure.



MANTIS

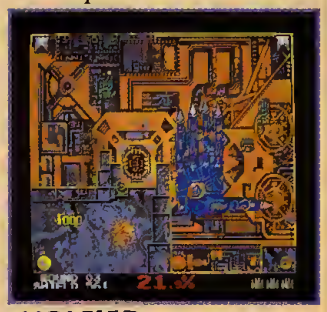
Ocean: A trio of games are slated for early spring release, including an FRP titled *Elf*, a futuristic melange of football and "Mad Max" hardware titled *Wild Wheels*, and *Robocop 3-D*.

Origin: *Ultima VII* has a marvelously simple mouse interface: one button for arms, one button for legs, plus a few double-clicks. That's it. And it has graphics of almost decadent lushness. And *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss*, with its 25 miles of subterranean terrors, may just be the Dungeon Game to End All Dungeon Games.

A game we've all been waiting for, *Strike Commander*, has been delayed in order to optimize the new technology being implemented. Look for it in June.

Paragon: *Mantis*, a blast-the-giant-bugs sci-fi adventure, is full of good 3-D space-flight effects and combat. Less tempting, if only because the FRP category is quite crowded with good titles, was *Spellbound*, which looked to us like an amalgamation, albeit an attractive one, of lots of other games.

Psygnosis: Hot on the heels of their spectacular success in 1991 with *Lemmings*, the folks at Psygnosis are promising more *Lemmings* theme products in '92. A new product due to hit soon is *Armour-Geddon*, a post-holocaust adventure in which the player takes control of tanks, hovercraft, stealth fighter, stealth bomber, and helicopter.



VOLFIED

Readysoft: This Canadian publisher had on hand a number of recently released titles — *Space Ace II: Borf's Revenge*, *Guy Spy*, and *Dragon's Lair: Escape from Singe's Castle*. On display from its Empire Software line were the just-released *Volfied*, a PC version of the Taito coin-op hit; *Sleeping Gods Lie*, a recent FRP import from England; *Eye of the Storm*, an

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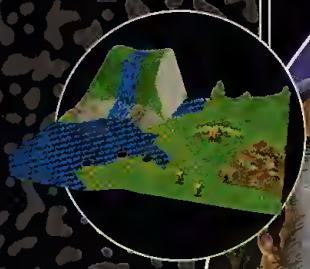
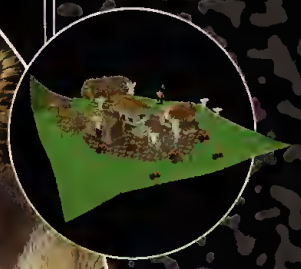
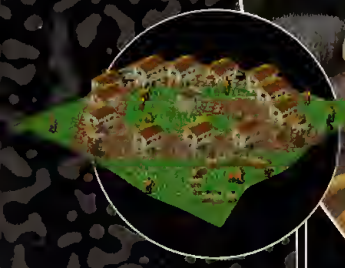


Spill the blood of your enemies and watch the angels of the dead ascend to the heavens.





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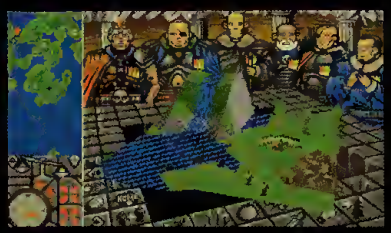

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intriguing futuristic space adventure; and *International Sports Challenge*.

Sierra: There were no new product announcements from Sierra, who was showing two recently released learning titles, *Mixed-Up Fairy Tales* and *EcoQuest*. Look for an *EcoQuest* sequel later this year.

Sir-Tech: This company impresses us as a team that really listens to, and responds to, its customers. The newest installment of its tremendously popular Wizardry series, *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*, incorporates many refinements based on such feedback, such as auto-mapping, outdoor settings, multiple beginnings, and does away with the universally despised dark red photocopy-proof copy protection document. The 256-color VGA graphics in *Crusaders* are gorgeous. *Crusaders* should be available in March.

Software Toolworks: The folks at Toolworks unveiled *Paperboy II*, as well as a classy update of a true masterpiece, *Chessmaster 3000*.

Spectrum Holobyte: If you hadn't noticed, Spectrum has been riding the headlines with its richly detailed, and seemingly authentic, simulation of modern Soviet politics, *Crisis in the Kremlin*. The designers have outdone themselves making a complex and rather gray subject look lively and entertaining, and the game's targeted late-spring release may not be too late to catch the wave. We hope it flies — this is a product that deserves respect.

Strategic Simulations Inc.: SSI showed a bigger, brawnier sequel to its popular Buck Rogers *Doomsday* game, titled *Matrix Cubed*. Slated for late-spring release is the newest addition to SSI's enormously popular AD&D series, *Treasures of the Savage Frontier*. An FRP with a different slant is *Tales of Magic* (spring release), a single-character fantasy adventure.

SSI also wants to lay to rest the cannard that it has abandoned war games in favor of FRP, and proved it to our satisfaction by providing a peek at several summer-and-fall releases, highlighted by *Carrier Strike* and *Conflict: Korea*.

CELTIC LEGENDS

GUEST

Three-Sixty: *V For Victory* has garnered raves among Mac fans as one of the best war games ever; PC fans need only wait until summer. Available in March will be *Theater of War*, an abstract chess-like strategy game using a handsome 3-D polygon-filled environment. Coming a few months later will be *Patriot*, a land warfare game utilizing some of *Harpoon*'s technology. And — hallelujah! — Three-Sixty promises that *Patriot* will be significantly easier to get into than *Harpoon*.

Ubi-Soft: Heading up this French company's spring releases is *Celtic Legends*, a fantasy-based strategy game, followed, in mid-summer, by *The Koshan Conspiracy*, a follow-up to last year's successful but controversial *B.A.T.*

Virgin Games: Last, but certainly not least, Virgin was showing *Dune*. This game, based on Frank Herbert's popular science fiction novel of the same name, has the look of the movie. If the game plays as good as it looks, we're all in for a treat.

Virgin's first MPC title, *Guest*, was also on display. Available in June, *Guest* features a full 3-D haunted house with user-selected points of view. The game is loaded with a variety of truly dazzling special effects. *Guest* is another title we're eagerly looking forward to playing.

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STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS, INC.®

GAME PLAYERS Annual

PC Game Awards 1991

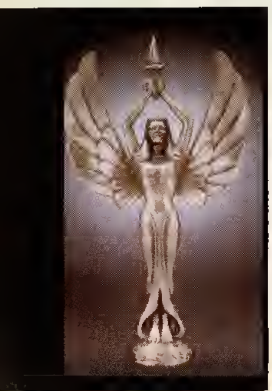
We're delighted to announce the 1991 winners of our annual PC Game Awards. The winners in each category, as well as the recipients of our PC Excellence Awards, received our collective vote as the very best in PC entertainment software in 1991. Our heartiest congratulations go to all of the publishers, designers, writers, artists, musicians, and programmers who produced these fine games.

Game of the Year

Chuck Yeager's Air Combat
Electronic Arts

This aerial combat simulation boasts the most convincing flight model we've seen yet, and AI routines so exceptional you'll be convinced there are human pilots in the cockpits of the enemy aircraft. With planes and dogfights from three wars, you'll be flying this one a long time.

Game Design and Programming: Brent Iverson. Graphics: Cynthia Hamilton. Music: George Sanger. Sound: Mike Sanders and Dave Warhol.



Best Arcade Action Game

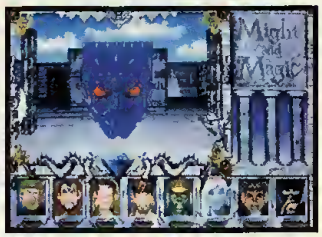
Hoverforce
Accolade

Creating a good PC arcade action game is no small task. Accolade has done a bang-up job with *Hoverforce*, which offers some of the smoothest animation we've seen. Few games deliver such a genuine sense of motion.

Game Design: Paul Carruthers and Ian Downend. Graphics: Kevin Bulmer and Rob Chapman. Sound and Music: Jason Brookes. Programmer: Ian Downend.

Best Fantasy Role-Playing Game

Might and Magic III: The Isles of Terra
New World Computing



With colorful, evocative graphics, the largest viewing window of any RPG with a first-person perspective, animated monsters of incredible variety, and sound effects that bring an entire world to aural life, *Might and Magic III* sets a new standard for fantasy RPGs.

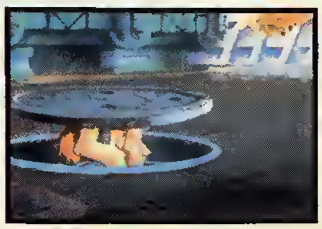
Game Design: Jon Van Caneghem. Graphics: Louis Johnson, Bonita Long-Hemsath, and Julia Ulano. Sound: Todd Hendrix. Programmer: Mark Caldwell.

Best Graphic Adventure

Space Quest IV
Sierra

Roger Wilco's first 256-color adventure retains all the hallmarks of previous Space Quest games — challenging puzzles, liberal doses of humor, and a wacky yet engaging plot. Arguably the best game in a classic series.

Game Design: Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy. Art: Mark Crowe. Music: Mark Siebert. Programmer: Scott Murphy.



Best Learning Game

Operation Neptune
The Learning Company

Great action, outstanding graphics, terrific sound, and great playability—sounds like an award-winning arcade game, right? This underwater adventure is proof positive that educational software has entered a new era.

Lead Designer: John Jacobs. Art and Animation: Ron Winnick and Amanda Bereny. Sound: Eric VanRhee. Lead Programmer: David Anderson.

Best Puzzle Game

Lemmings
Psygnosis

Lemmings is such an innovative, addictive, and easy-to-play game that we seriously considered it for "Game of the Year." A special tribute goes to the designers, who made such a terrific game playable by anyone from 8 to 85.

Game Design: DMA Design. Graphics and Animation: Gary Timmons. Sound and Music: Brian Johnston. Programmers: Dave Jones, Russell Kay, Brian Watson, and Scott Johnston.

Best Simulation

Red Baron
Dynamix

From its jump-right-in dogfight mode to its richly detailed career option, *Red Baron* is the best World War I aerial simulation ever. And it proves that a great simulation can be enjoyed by both novices and experts.

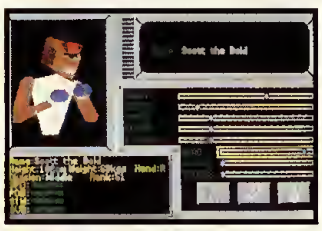
Game Design: Damon Slye. Art: Mark Peasley. Musical Score: Cayanie Music. Audio Director: Alan McKean. Lead Programmer: Paul Bowman.

Best Sports Game

4D Boxing
Electronic Arts

4D Boxing uses polygon graphics to create animation so smooth and lifelike you might need a corner man to get you ready for the next round. There may be games with more realistic graphics, but no sports simulation matches the intensity of *4D Boxing*.

Created by Distinctive Software Inc. Game Design and Programming: Jay MacDonald and Chris Taylor. Original Concept: Dan Mattrick. Graphics and Animation: Gerard DeSouza. Sound and Music: Michael J. Sokyrka and Kris Hatfield.

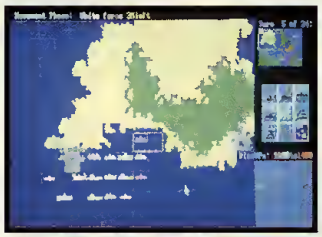


Best Strategy Game

The Lost Admiral
QQP

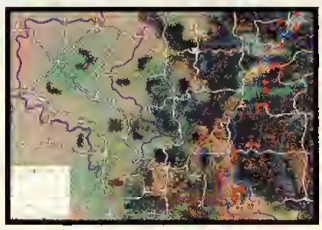
This may be the best abstract strategy game since *Empire*—simple to learn, yet full of subtle possibilities, it offers tremendous replay value. In our opinion, this naval combat game is destined to become a classic.

Game Design: Bruce Williams Zaccagnino. Programmers: Thurston Searfoss and Bruce Williams Zaccagnino.



Best War Game

Patton Strikes Back
Broderbund



By rethinking the concept of what a war game should be, and by presenting that concept in a seductively attractive manner, veteran designer Chris Crawford has given game players not only something great to play, but also a lot to think about.

Game Design and Programming: Chris Crawford. Graphics and Animation: Aaron Urbina. Sound: Aaron Urbina and Chris Crawford.

Excellence Awards

Are We There Yet?
Electronic Arts

Castle of Dr. Brain
Sierra

Castles
Interplay

Chip's Challenge
Epyx

Continuum
Data East

D/Generation
The Software Toolworks

Eye of the Beholder
SSI

Hare Raising Havoc
Disney Software

King's Quest V
Sierra

Lexi-Cross
Interplay

McGee at the Fun Fair
Lawrence Productions

Megafortress
Three-Sixty

The Perfect General
QQP

Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe
LucasFilm Games

Shuttle
Virgin Games

SimEarth
Maxis

Speedball 2
Konami

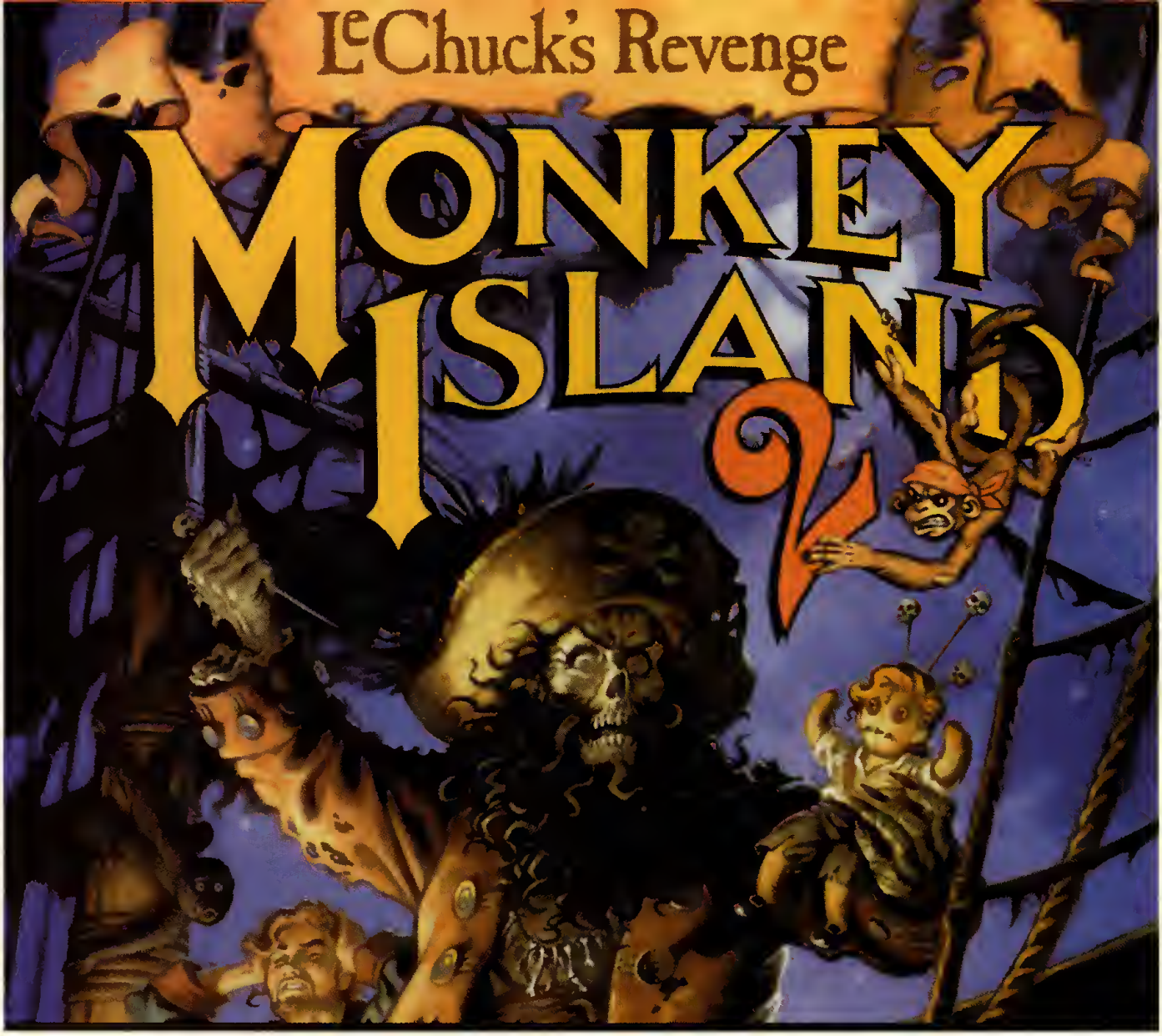
Timequest
Legend Entertainment

Tony LaRussa's Ultimate Baseball
SSI

The Treehouse
Broderbund

Wing Commander II
Origin

(Selections for 1991 awards include games received for review by Game Players prior to December 6, 1991. Games received after this date will be eligible for the 1992 awards. Awards are based solely on PC versions.)



MOJO AND MONKEYS:

A GUIDE TO *LECHUCK'S REVENGE*

Put on your eye patch and dust off the Jolly Roger — your days as a buccaneer aren't over yet. In The Secret of Monkey Island, *you sent evil ghost pirate LeChuck to the hereafter with a little root beer. But now LeChuck's back, and he's none too pleased.*

LESLIE MIZELL

Ron Gilbert continues the adventures of novice pirate Guybrush Threepwood in *LeChuck's Revenge: Monkey Island 2*, the latest graphic adventure from Lucasfilm Games. You'll see several familiar faces here — Stan and his fortunetelling mom, the Men of Low Moral Fiber, and, of course, the beautiful Gov. Elaine Marley — but don't expect to finish your trials in *LeChuck's Revenge* as quickly as you did in *Monkey Island*. This adventure is *much* more difficult: It's a game for true swashbucklers, not just pirate wannabes.

To be truthful, *LeChuck's Revenge* has easy and difficult modes, so everyone has a shot at finishing the game. But most players will find the easy mode *too* simplistic — at least half the puzzles in the hard version aren't included. On the other hand, parts of the difficult mode

No sooner have you arrived in lovely Woodtick on Scabb Island than you're mugged by Largo LeGrande, the resident bully. There's nothing you can do now but get a job to earn more money.

The Men of Low Moral Fiber haven't changed much since Monkey Island. *Maybe this time you can save their rat from its pitiful life. Remember that it's a Muenster Monster.*

It looks like rats aren't the only creatures on Scabb Island who enjoy a helping of cheese squigglies. Set the alligator loose, and you can search his bowl—and Largo's room—without interruption.

Check out the local mojo house for any potions or spells you might need. The fortuneteller will even help you make a voodoo doll—if you can come up with the right ingredients.

What's a little grave-robbing among pirates? The graveyard is the only place you're likely to find a piece of a long-dead Largo ancestor.

Captain Dread may move to a laid-back reggae beat, but he's still your ticket off Scabb Island. Provide him with anything he wants, even if it means hard times for poor Wally.

There aren't many places to find an honest day's work in Woodtick. Even the tavernkeeper already has a cook. Do what any pirate would do in your shoes—get the cook fired for his unhygienic entrees.

A well-placed pin in a voodoo doll does wonders for the pirate population of Scabb Island. Unfortunately, even as Largo beats a hasty retreat, he revives the ghost pirate LeChuck.

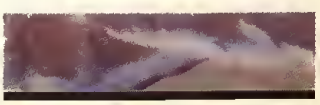
There's a piece of the map hanging in Governor Marley's house, but you can't just walk in and pick it up unless you're playing in easy mode. In difficult mode, you've got a long way to go before the piece is yours.

could well drive you insane. There are leaps in logic, elaborate series of steps to be followed — everything, in fact, but mapping (thank heavens!).

Your best bet is to keep parallel games running in each mode so you can occasionally get clues from the easy game if you get stuck in the difficult version. At the very least, the easy mode lets you see most of the items you need to complete the adventure, but don't think that information will make solving problems a cakewalk. Getting the objects into your inventory should provide plenty of challenge, even for hardened adventurers.

You begin *LeChuck's Revenge* on lovely Scabb Island, which is ruled with an iron fist by pirate Largo LeGrande. Your first mission is to rout the scallywag, then raise the funds to charter a ship off the island. For the rest of the game, you travel among Scabb Island, Phatt Island, and Booty Island, trying to locate the four pieces of the map to the Big Whoop treasure. After you've got the complete map, you head to Dinky Island to locate your riches.

Expect the same slightly warped sense of humor as in *Monkey Island*, along with references to other Lucasfilm games and movies. And for even more laughs, be sure to



You need all four pieces of the map before you can search for the Big Whoop—or meet LeChuck again. You can find two pieces on Booty Island, and one each on Scabb and Phatt.

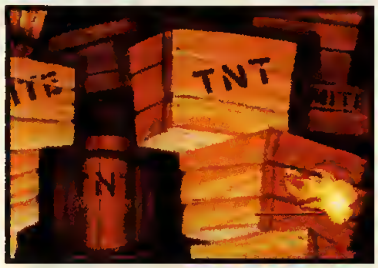
If you hypnotize Jojo the piano-playing monkey, he'll follow you anywhere. Once you've put him into a trance, he's as stiff as... say, a monkey wrench.

The spitting sequence is especially difficult because of the number of puzzles you must solve. First, distract the onlookers and move the flags. Then mix up a concoction to make your spit as thick as Largo's. Finally, watch the crowd for the perfect time to loogie.

Yoda's not around, but this dream sequence shares a certain kinship with The Empire Strikes Back. *On the other hand, it's not every pirate who has tap-dancing skeletons as parents.*

Once you've pawned the spitting plaque, you can charter Kate's boat and sail to the wreckage of the Mad Monkey. *You don't have to saw off the figurehead; just pick it up, then trade it at the store for another piece of the map.*

Your map may be complete, but it's not going to do you much good while you're in LeChuck's clutches. A pool of acid isn't a bad way for a pirate to go, but you can avoid the Great Beyond with some buccaneer spit.



Oops! Well, here's one way to get to Dinky Island.

Polly wants a cracker or two, and she won't help you with directions unless you give them to her. A little low-salt water and a box of cracker mix should do the trick.

So close, but yet so far. You may have to wait until Monkey Island 3 *to get your hands on more treasure.*

To avoid a voodoo-fate worse than death, you'd better complete a mojo doll of LeChuck, and pronto. *Remember: a piece of hair, a piece of cloth, a piece of spit, and a piece of ancestor are all it takes.*

spend some time searching through the card catalog on Phatt Island. While you can't read fake books such as *Beyond Hearts and Question Marks: Shadow Puppetry for the Two-Hook Pirate,* the titles themselves are almost worth the price of the game.

The music and sound effects are the results of Lucasfilm's new *i*MUSE system (see "Lucasfilm Games" in our CES report, elsewhere in this issue). With a fitting soundtrack that includes calypso and reggae themes, *i*MUSE add an extra dimension to the game.

LeChuck's Revenge is a tough treasure trip, filled with rats, dry cleaning, spitting, insults, voodoo dolls, spitting, monkeys, wanted posters, spitting, balloons, cheese squigglies, spitting, parrots, potions, and more spitting. Quite frankly, you'll probably hate the ending. But you'll *also* wish the next installment were immediately available so you could dig right in.

GP

640K minimum memory; VGA or MCGA graphics; 286 or faster computer required; hard drive required; supports Ad Lib, Roland, Sound Blaster, and SoundMaster sound cards; mouse recommended.

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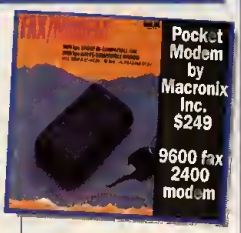

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ALTERNATE LIVES

NEIL RANDALL

ROLLING YOUR OWN: ***THE BARD'S TALE CONSTRUCTION SET***

The main menu shows the sub-programs available. Each will take you to a full design package.

Somewhere along the line, most gamers decide that they'd like to try their hand at designing their own game. This seems especially true of RPG fans. Much of this desire can be traced back to the roots of the genre: back in pre-computer days, running a Dungeons and Dragons, Traveler, Dragon-Quest, or RuneQuest session meant sitting for hours, plotting a scenario, and mapping it all out. Where to put the encounters, how to initiate the action, what to say at each stage of the players' quest — the dedicated gamesmaster could spend days or even weeks making sure that everything ran smoothly.

With computer RPGs, there is no place for a gamesmaster. Instead of building scenarios, we play them out. In the process, we often wish we could do more, especially if the RPG is overly clumsy, time-consuming, or simply dull. Even if it's good, however, we still wish we could help. Where, we keep asking, are the deep, rich sub-plots?

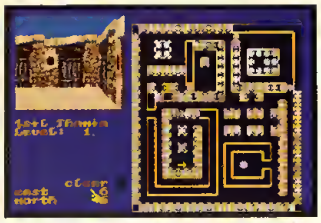
The Item Editor lets you assign specific attributes to each and every weapon in the game.

Enter *Bard's Tale Construction Set* from Interplay. As its name suggests, it gives you the ability to invent your own FRP adventures, then lets you play them out or, preferably, give them to a friend to play. Create dungeons, stock them with monsters of your choosing, and fashion magical spells and weapons of whatever design you like.

It sounds great, and in many ways it is. But constructing a Bard's Tale scenario reveals two things about computer RPGs. First, and rather obviously, is that the whole process involves a great deal of not always enjoyable work. Second — and this is something I've stated in this column on numerous occasions — computer RPGs are extremely limited in scope, action, and, indeed, role-playing.

Let's look at the work. The main menu for *Bard's Tale Construction Set* (*BTCS*) offers five choices: Item Editor, Spell Editor, Monster Editor, Map Editor, and Utilities.

With the Item Editor, you can alter the components of any of the existing items (including weapons, armor, enchanted rings, and so on), or you can design and embellish your own. You determine which character class (or classes) can use the item, how much it costs, to what degree it increases a character's chance of hitting an opponent, how much damage it does normally, and what kind of "special" damage it might do. You assign a percentage chance to this special damage (i.e., a trident might have a 30% chance of doing special damage), and what kind of special damage it actually does (examples include paralysis, aging, insanity, and so on). You can also determine how many



The Map Editor allows you to design each adventure location and to place creatures and events in them. The possibilities are practically endless.

times the item is capable of doing something, and what kinds of spells it might contain.

The Spell Editor is equally detailed. Again, you can work with the existing spells, or you can invent your own spells from scratch. You assign the four-letter code you type to use the spell, which mage classes (up to five) can use it, the spell's level, and the magic points required to cast. You decide on ranges and targets for the spell, as well as specific durations. You must also select from 29 choices just what the spell actually does. (You can't invent new spell effects, but the list of 29 offers plenty of variety).

The most fun in *BTCS* is working with the Monster Editor. The designers apparently anticipated this — the game includes only a few monsters of its own; you're expected, quite obviously, to add the ones you want. *BTCS* gives you a wolf, but if you want to differentiate between white wolves and timber wolves, or move to werewolves or dire wolves, you'll have to fire up the Monster Editor and get to work.

You start by naming your monster, then establishing the distance from the party at which it will appear. You fix the number of moves it can make per round, and the rate at which it attacks. You can create illusory monsters, and set each one to a different style of attacking. You can also select from the game's picture gallery (which contains more than 40 pictures) to establish what the creature looks like, or you can import *Deluxe Paint Enhanced* or *Deluxe Paint Animator* graphics.

There's more. Each monster needs an armor class, a rating for the number of damage dice that are rolled, a percentage for magic resistance, and the amount of treasure collected by the party on the monster's destruction. Each monster can also be assigned a type of extra damage it does, ranging from poison and insanity to critical hits and a draining of its attacker's spell points. Finally, you assign the maximum number of these monsters to appear during a random encounter, and decide whether or not the monster can launch an attack from extra range.

The most complex module in *BTCS* is the Map Editor. Several maps are included with the program, and your starting choice will almost certainly be to edit these maps rather than create your own. Eventually, though, you'll need a dungeon, city, or wilderness area of your own design — and this is where the real work begins.

Each map consists of a 22 x 22 grid square. Using the Map Editor, you draw walls, doors, or secret doors on indoor structures; if you're designing a wilderness scene you can draw trees, huts, and secret trails. When you've drafted your map, cursor around and place Specials. These include such things as location of monsters, buying and selling items, teleporting, having monsters either join or turn on the party, play sounds, and so on. The trick to creating an enjoyable and challenging dungeon, in fact, lies with your choice of Specials.

Assigning Specials is similar to programming — the DO command initiates an action, while conditional actions follow the IF...THEN...ELSE sequence of statements. But the game does the real programming for you. All you need to do is figure out what's supposed to happen on any particular square, then go to the Specials menu and look for the commands that will make it work. After a couple tries, and after studying some of the examples from *BTCS*'s maps, it all becomes second nature.

The point of going through all this design work, of course, is to see your game in action. You can put your multilocation opus in operation through the Utilities menu, at which point you'll have a fully playable game. Given enough random elements, in fact, you can even play it yourself. The real enjoyment, though, is trading *BTCS* designs with friends — this way there's no waiting for new Bard's Tale scenarios to hit the store shelves.

Despite the design possibilities it allows, *BTCS* might actually be doing the FRP world a disservice. *BTCS* lays bare the extremely shaky foundation of FRPs — the essential design in which players wander around killing monsters and taking treasure. Apart from the fact that it's utterly impossible for all those monsters — and often such very huge ones — to coexist in those multiroomed dungeons, and even if you have no trouble believing that these monsters are carrying gold with them, the point remains that fantasy isn't about killing monsters. It's about questing for the cause of good, interacting with gods, and creating and saving civilizations; to put it simply, it's about the making of myth. What most FRPs give us instead, and what *BTCS* shows us so clearly, is the idea of fantasy as an obstacle course, a notion that is wearing very, very thin.

BTCS is a good concept, and it works well. But it may well work best as a design assistant for non-computer FRP gamesmasters, who can add *real* fantasy to their creations as well.

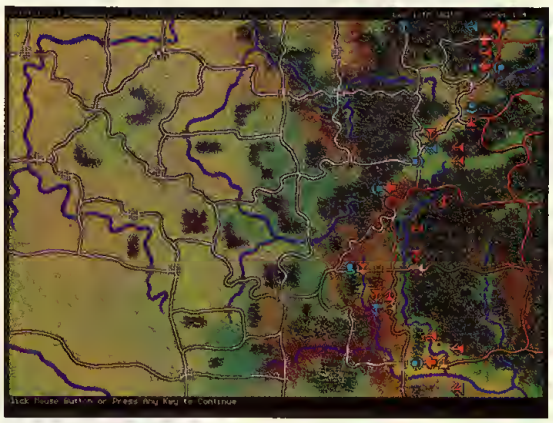
GP

With your work completed, it's time to embark on a new Bard's Tale adventure.

THE DESKTOP GENERAL

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

A WAR GAME FOR PEOPLE WHO HATE WAR GAMES



With a click of your mouse, you're instantly shown all active supply lines.

A year or so ago, the Conventional Wisdom was that computer war games were gently on their way to extinction, or would become exclusively the province of a few small niche-oriented software companies. Indeed, for a while there were so few actual war games (as opposed to military hardware simulations) coming into our editorial offices that we even discussed discontinuing this column.

The reasons for the assumed demise of the genre, at least as a mass-market category, seemed to center on a feeling that the original generation of war gamers — kids who cut their teeth on Avalon Hill board games back in the sixties and then developed board gaming to elephantine dimensions as young adults before finally gravitating to computers — had pursued the elusive goal of realism to the point where people who just wanted to have fun with history were being shut out. War game software designed by hardcore *grognards* tended to overwhelm the casual gamer with technical minutiae, arcane mathematical formulas (an example from a recent game: "...a unit with 60% readiness in SL5 would recover (SL5 * 10)%*(40)=20%..."), impenetrable, jargon-laden documentation, and user interfaces that were about as friendly as a proposition from Wittgenstein.

grognard — literally, "grumbler"; originally a Napoleonic slang-word for a hard-bitten, seen-it-all veteran soldier; a hard-to-impress expert, a nitpicker.

Perhaps in reaction to this, or perhaps as a spontaneous phenomenon, a quiet revolution has been taking place in the field of war-game design over the past year — and a hybrid form of game seems to be emerging, one that appears poised to revitalize the genre. From QQP's *The Perfect General* and *The Lost Admiral* to a whole slew of RAW Entertainment products slated for release, we're now seeing games which include all the data-crunched historical authenticity any *grognard* could ask for, yet which take full advantage of the PC's power, speed, and graphics in order to present the games in an agreeable, visually attractive, easy-to-play manner.

The latest, and by far the sexiest, war game to embody this philosophy is **Broderbund's** *Patton Strikes Back*, written by Chris Crawford. (This game, released last De-

cember, received our Best PC War Game award for 1991). Crawford's credentials as a *grognard* are impressive: his earlier titles (*Eastern Front, Patton vs. Rommel, Balance of Power*) are considered classic first-generation computer games. But even Crawford finally became fed up with what he describes as the "hairy monster" breed of war games, and turned his talents toward creating "a war game for the rest of us."

Patton Strikes Back sucks you in from the instant you load it: a montage of dramatic war photos spreads across the screen to the accompaniment of rattling drums. All the action takes place on a beautifully rendered map of the Ardennes theater of operations, and the game begins at zero hour, December 16, 1944 — the start of the German Army's last great offensive of World War II.

Crawford designed this game from the interface out. "First I established what would be easy for the player, then I designed the game around those capabilities." And to be honest, I've never seen a battle of this scope rendered so clearly in *any* form of graphic presentation.

Each unit is represented by a simple icon which shows you at a glance what the status of that unit is at any moment. Units in motion are depicted by a slender arrowhead; attacking units by a thicker and more aggressive-looking arrow; units on the defensive by dots with an outward-facing shield to indicate which way the defenses are facing; and shattered units are depicted with an "X."

The game proceeds in real time (fully adjustable from a slow crawl to arcade velocity, as the player desires), with the computer constantly adding to or subtracting from a running total of points. If you reach the final day of the campaign, December 28, with 500 points or more, you win, regardless of which side you're playing.

Crawford has designed a real gee-whiz method of symbolizing combat: when two units start to fight, a small call-out window pops out from their location on the map and actual digitized newsreel footage rolls while the computer tells you the results of the engagement. Artillery pieces recoil, shells burst, tanks grind forward, tactical aircraft peel off and rake a German vehicle with tracers — all to the accompaniment of marvelously crisp, punchy sound effects.

If you grow tired of these "newsreels," you can cut them off. So far, even after dozens of hours of play, nobody here has done that. Indeed, this is the kind of game you'll call your friends over to see.

At certain points during the battle, a chime sounds and a larger call-out window emerges to engulf the screen, revealing a dramatic photo of an incident, a weapon, or a commander, complete with an informative, well-written "trading card" capsule of information about the subject.

Need tactical advice? Click on one of the pull-down menus and a digitized general will appear to offer sound council. If you're playing the German side, you'll see Crawford himself in SS drag, complete with monocle and Iron Cross (his American counterpart is a cigar-chomping Sgt. Fury look-alike). Rather amazingly, these tactical tips are very precise and situation-specific (and hence very helpful), not the sort of generic fortune-cookie statements one might expect.

Take control of the German forces, and Chris Crawford will share his strategic insight with you.

Issuing orders to a unit is easy: click on the arrow (game time is suspended while you do this), then click again to assign a direction and to tell the unit whether it should attack, defend, or mobilize at maximum speed. In the latter case, the unit will automatically go into attack mode if it runs into an enemy force. Should you overlook some units during the excitement of battle, another menu bar displays every unit that's currently idle, so getting those slackers into action is no problem.

All the information about unit strength, readiness, and supply status is available with the click of the mouse, but it's arranged and presented so that nothing gets in the way of the main game screen. As the campaign unfolds and the clock ticks, the combination of fluid movement, dramatic imagery, and tactical urgency creates a *gestalt* experience that's both compelling and entertaining. The game components are so well meshed that both experienced war gamers and novices are likely to be entranced.

The game includes adjustable levels of difficulty, and the player can opt for weather and reinforcements to be historically accurate or random. These options give *Patton* considerable replay value; you'll not tire of it quickly.

Frankly, when this game came in for review, I was hesitant to load it up. Starting back in 1965 with Avalon Hill's pioneering board game, I had played just about all the Battle of the Bulge scenarios I ever wanted to play; the battle no longer really interested me as a simulation. (C'mon — the Germans always lose, right?) *Patton Strikes Back*, however, hooked me from the opening screen and made the campaign fascinating all over again.

What we have here, then, is a potential classic. Considerable credit should go to the people at Broderbund, who went out on something of a corporate limb by publishing a game so utterly different from their traditional line. I applaud them for their wisdom and good taste. Chris Crawford has given *all* computer gamers something wonderful to behold, and he has given wargame aficionados something to ponder.

GP

You can access detailed information on all sorts of weapons, from bazookas to tanks. Each description includes a "scrapbook" photo.

INSTANT REPLAY

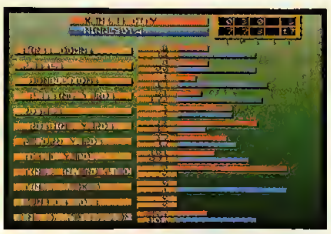
PETER SCISCO

WINTER ACTION FROM ACCOLADE

The instant replay feature lets you relive the glory of that great touchdown run.

With games like *Jack Nicklaus*, *Hardball!*, *Fast Break*, and *Grand Prix Racing*, Accolade has become one of the leading developers of PC sports simulations. Even with its recent foray into role-playing games and video arcades, two recent titles from Accolade — *Mike Ditka Ultimate Football* and *The Games: Winter Challenge* — underscore Accolade's commitment to PC sports.

You might remember *4th and Inches*, Accolade's arcade-inspired football game for joystick jocks. Instead of upgrading *4th and Inches* to match the speed and display capabilities of today's computer, Accolade chose to develop a brand new football game. But if you look closely, you'll see more than just a family resemblance between *Mike Ditka Ultimate Football (MDUF)* and its predecessor.



You're updated on all essential statistics between quarters and after every score.

MDUF is a strong sports simulation, really much better than *4th and Inches* ever aspired to be. It boasts fine graphics, plenty of depth, and an adequate sense of realism, all enhanced by legitimate arcade appeal. It's a fairly simple game to play, but challenging enough to keep you interested through several seasons.

Before you jump right into a game, though, you should customize the contest to your skill level. For example, you can choose whether to simply control a player on the field (you can switch to different players), just call the plays, or to coach and play. The game supports a joystick, a keyboard, or a mouse. When running the game as a player and coach, I preferred the keyboard; it offered the best control and the least amount of error on the field. In coach-only mode, I found a mouse best suited for play selection.

The passing game can be set to Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced, and Pro. Get your bearings in the Beginner mode, which stops the action as you

A digitized referee is on hand for to make all the signals. Each play is followed by a brief summary of the action.

cycle through your eligible receivers at your leisure. As you move up the scale in difficulty, you must learn new skills — how to move the receiver to an open position, how to evade the pass rush and, finally, how to find the open man while eluding the arms of a deranged defensive lineman.

Curiously enough, I found handoffs harder to master than the passes. Handoffs look so simple in a real game we tend to take them for granted. Playing *MDUF* reminded me that executing a play is a matter of careful timing and scripted positions.

The team editor in *MDUF* betrays the game's lineage — it's very similar to the system used in *4th and Inches*. Each player is defined by position, number, and name. His talent his represented by three numbers, one each for Speed, Skill, and Strength. These attributes are rated on a scale of 50 - 99, with 50 being very average and 99 being near perfect. Each player in the Accolade league (the default league) has a preset number of overall talent points that cannot be changed, only shifted from one attribute to another. For example, you might increase a running back's Speed at the expense of Strength or Skill. He'll run faster, but he won't be able to break as many tackles.

MDUF *uses a standard power meter for field goals and extra points.*

You can also create your own leagues, teams, and plays. In building a league, you're given the chance to create or modify each team you put into the league. This involves everything from changing names and skill levels and positions to selecting the color of the uniform for home and away games. Using some imagination and the year-end stats from the sports page of your local paper, you could even design a league modeled after the real NFL.

The most intriguing construction element for many armchair coaches, however, is the playbook. Like most other recent PC football games, *MDUF* allows you to modify existing plays or to create entirely new ones. After selecting one of six formations, it's a simple matter of assigning responsibilities to the main players (receivers, running backs, quarterback) and then drawing patterns for them on the screen.

From its league construction to its roster builder to its play book planner, *MDUF* is a solid performer. I haven't even talked about a lot of the details, such as the instant replay feature with its various camera angles, alternative viewpoints during game play, great sound support, and so on. Only a few missing ingredients -- the absence of weather, no two-minute drill, no hurry-up offense, no choice of stadium types (outdoor, indoor, artificial turf, grass) -- keep it from dethroning *Joe Montana Football* and *John Madden Football* as reigning PC gridiron champs.

As the fall football season gives way to midwinter, you can still get a fire going in your PC with Accolade's other cold-weather entry, *The Games: Winter Challenge*. This is full-fledged Olympic action in several sports: the luge, downhill skiing, cross country skiing, bobsled, speed skating, giant slalom, biatholon, and ski jumping.

Winter Challenge is pure arcade action for up to ten players. If you can't find enough friends to fill the lineup, the computer will take control of a variety of contestants from several countries.

You can practice your skills until you feel you're ready for competition, and you'd be wise to take advantage of the opportunity — each sport offers its own challenges. I found speed skating to be the easiest to grasp, while the skiing competitions proved most difficult. I had an easier time on the luge than on the bobsled. And I fell down so many times during the biathlon it's a wonder that my shots hit anything but snowflakes. I figure that with another month of practice, the odds of my winning the gold are about the same as Miami getting buried under a blizzard—it *could* happen, but I won't wait with baited breath.

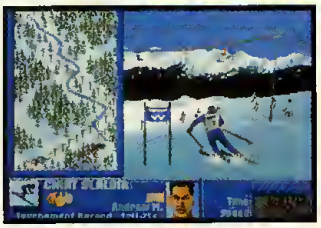
Winter Challenge:*Take a long last look down that icy road before making your jump.*

Replay your world-record performance in speed skating from start to finish.

Winter Challenge offers the standard replay option, so you can relive a gruesome crash at the end of the ski jump or on the bobsled course. There's an option for choosing an individual face, male or female, to represent you during competition.

If your idea of fun doesn't include strapping two pieces of wood to your feet and hurtling down a hill of snow and ice, *Winter Challenge* will let you live the thrill of victory and suffer the agony of defeat without ever having to bite the ice.

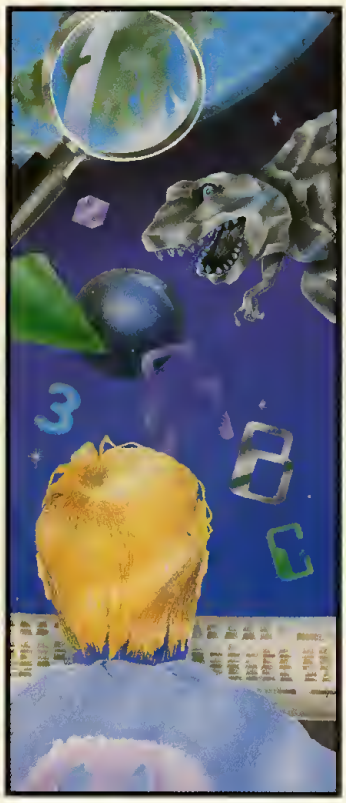
Now that all the icy wind of the dark months has us chilled to the bone, it's time to look in the mailbag and see what's in stores for the Boys of Summer. For one thing, **Electronic Arts** has released the *Commissioner's Disk II* for *Earl Weaver Baseball II*. This disk has everything you need to run a league -- from drafting free agents to building new ballparks to constructing your own managers with a style all their own. It won't get Pete Rose reinstated, but it's a sure bet to improve your Earl Weaver game.



The giant slalom is a tough test of speed and balance.

Also coming out of the bullpen are two stadium disks from **SSI** to be used with the excellent *Tony LaRussa's Ultimate Baseball*. The N.L. Stadiums disk includes all 12 current National League stadiums, while the A.L. Stadiums disk does the same for 14 ballparks in that league. So play ball!

GP



THE LEARNING GAME

LESLIE EISER

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

That's a Mega Mouth guarding a piece of the space capsule. Drop down quickly, and you might be able to grab it before the Mega Mouth grabs you.

Hold everything! An educational software column in a magazine known and respected for its great game reviews? You've got to be kidding. What do games have to do with education?

The answer is: a lot more than you think. There's been a revolution in the educational software market in recent years that virtually guarantees you're going to see more and more shelf space devoted to educational games in your local software store. And as every parent or teacher knows, there's more to picking a good program than going with the suggestion of a clerk barely old enough to shave. That's why I'm here — to keep you up to date on the newest, hottest, most exciting computerware for kids. I'll be reviewing software that's fun to play, exciting to use, and, most importantly, offers the user a valid educational experience.

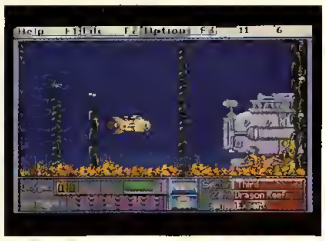
This doesn't mean that only programs with clearly stated educational goals are going to be covered. Education is much more than learning math facts or taking multiple-choice quizzes. In this column, you'll hopefully discover that there's lots more to learning than meets the eye.

You can't pick more obviously educational — and possibly more boring — subjects than math and spelling, the focal points of *Operation Neptune* (voted Game Players Best PC Learning Game for 1991) and *Spellbound*. These dynamite games from **The Learning Company**, one of the best-known names in educational computing, are superior examples of the exciting trends in the field of learning software. The combination of fast action, dynamite graphics, wonderful sound effects, and good educational theory is tough to beat. These programs look like games and play like games because they *are* games — but they perform like great teachers.

Know anyone who needs to practice their math skills? Get them ready to navigate the underwater depths of Limestone Ridge, Hammerhead Fracture, and the Sea Forest with the arcade-like math program *Operation Neptune*. Fulfilling the secret mission and rescuing the downed Galaxy capsule will challenge even the most dedicated videogamer.

Designed with two different levels, each of which has five zones with three sectors, *Operation Neptune* provides the same kind of high-voltage action as a shoot-'em-up — but it strategically places interludes of math problems disguised as navigation questions and environmental management problems.

The goal is to navigate a mini-sub through underwater mazes filled with magnificently colored vegetation and teeming with real and imaginary sea creatures. As the player



Whew — the supply station at last!

transverses the mazes in the sub, he must pick up the scattered pieces of the capsule and decipher the messages found inside each one. Meanwhile, math problems are being radioed to the sub from the surface tender.

Youngsters won't notice that they're actually doing word problems as they struggle to calculate when the next earth tremor will strike the sub or if there is sufficient water in the holding tanks to make it to the next supply station. In keeping with good educational theory, finding these solutions will not use up precious time — instead, a mistake causes a slight oxygen leak.

Fortunately, you can't die in *Operation Neptune*. Even if disaster strikes and the oxygen supply is totally depleted, you're only sent back to the last supply station. Quitting the game saves your general location, so, unlike many videogames, you don't have to start all over again each time you stop playing. This makes *Operation Neptune* quite solvable, although it may take over 20 hours of "math practice" to get the job done.

What makes the educational aspects of *Operation Neptune* so interesting is the care and attention that has been lavished on the questions. Entire levels deal only with problems involving addition, subtraction, and multiplying fractions. Other levels concentrate on problems requiring the use of the calculator, or unit conversion (both metric and English). There are area, volume, rate, and temperature problems to solve as well. Customizing options let either the parent or the child change the kinds of questions asked, so kids with varying ranges of abilities can profit from using the same game.

I can't imagine any child between the ages of 10 and 13 that wouldn't enjoy *Operation Neptune*. Even if they don't want or need the math practice, the arcade action alone will keep them entertained for quite a while. Older kids may find the math content a nuisance, but they'll still play the game for hours — and they're practicing their math all the while!

Some kids find spelling a breeze, but most don't. For those who have problems with spelling — and if one of your own is in that boat, you have my deepest sympathy, because so is one of mine — there's nothing less comprehensible. To a poor speller, the English language is full of strange pitfalls, with words like *right*, *cough*, or *through* that can't be sounded out but instead must be memorized.

Children for whom spelling doesn't come naturally must drill, drill, drill, and that's where a game with spectacular digitized speech effects like *Spellbound* can come in handy. Kids know that *Spellbound* is going to be fun to use the minute they see the picture of the Master of Mischief on the package. As a member of The Learning Company's very popular Super Solvers series, *Spellbound* is the Master of Mischief's latest attempt to keep things hopping.

The basic concept is simple. The Master of Mischief has challenged your youngster to a series of spelling bees. As they improve their spelling skills, they'll be able to compete at higher and higher levels. To make sure they know what they're doing before they find themselves standing in front of a microphone, the game offers three practice activities: a crossword puzzle to solve, a word search game to play, and a flash card mode that encourages extra drill and practice.

A minimum level of success at each of the practice games is required before you can face the Master of Mischief in a spelling bee. The first contests take place on the classroom level, but eventually you'll face him at the national level in front of roving TV cameras.

The Spellbound *radio set makes it easy to choose an activity.*

Spellbound has a database of over 2,000 words divided into topics like games, places, fun, word wise (with subtitles like great sounds, palindromes, and homonyms), nature, grab bag, environment, people, and holidays. Choose a topic and you get a list of eight words, several of which are speech-digitized (they're remarkably clear, even on a built-in PC speaker) for use during the spelling bees.

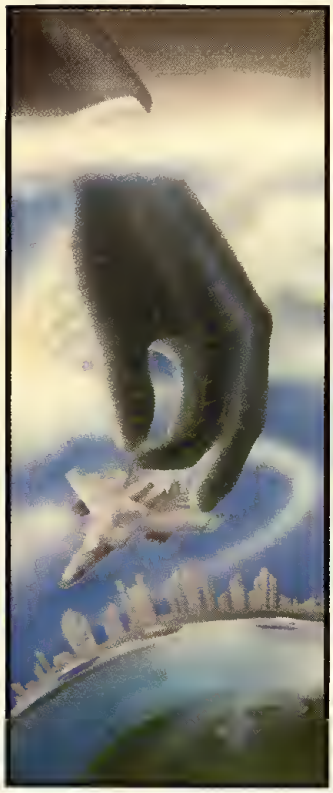
These word search puzzles are tough. Here's "tissue" — can you spot "eardrum"?

Customizing options let you add your own spelling lists to suit your child's needs. In either case, using *Spellbound* is certain to make practicing spelling less of a struggle and much more of a pleasure.

After making it to the Spelling Bee at the County Fair, you check out your opponents — the one on the far right is the Mas-ter of Mischief himself.

Both *Operation Neptune* and *Spellbound* work with CGA and EGA graphics, but you'll need VGA to see the three-dimensional effect of the underwater scenes and to appreciate the excellent cartoon work in *Operation Neptune*. Neither game absolutely requires a hard drive, but you'll be happier playing them on one. *Spellbound* is intended for ages 7-12, while *Operation Neptune* works best with kids age 10 and up.

GP



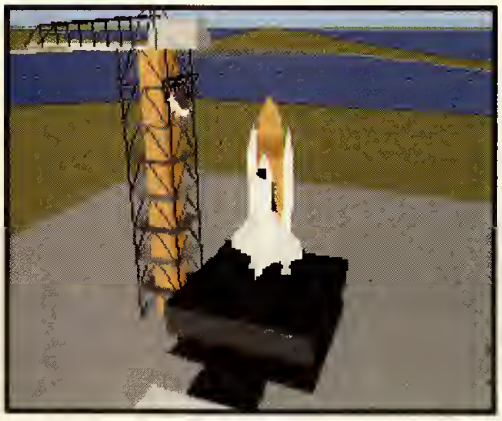
VIRTUAL REALITY

ARLAN LEVITAN

SHUTTLE: DO WE HAVE A LIFTOFF?

Well-rendered, mouse-sensitive views of the cockpit's interior help make for easy hopping from one control panel to another.

One look around my home office is enough to tell you I'm a certified Space Shuttle junkie. Even if you manage to ignore the photos on the wall from a half dozen shuttle launches, a quick thumb through the nearby stack of video laser titles will turn up a complete set of Space Shuttle mission disks from the Space Archive series. If a shuttle is aloft, you can also count on the small color TV being tuned in to the NASA channel on cable.



If you're going to be in the vicinity of the Kennedy Space Center, just drop by the pad and we'll take off together.

So you can imagine my delight when Virgin Games' simulation, *Shuttle*, appeared on my digital doorstep. I'd been watching the Shuttle for years — now I could actually fly it! After a month of daily bouts with *Shuttle*, I'm ready to file my flight report.

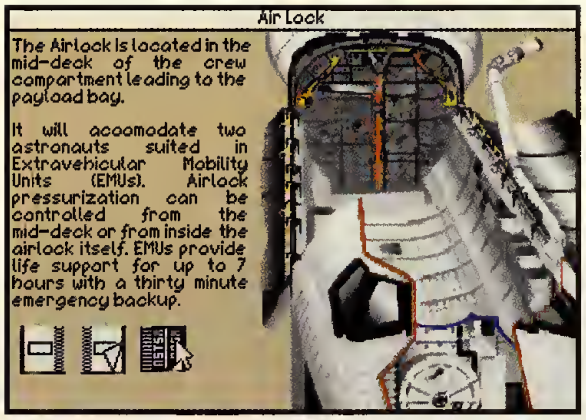
It was a stormy month, filled with as much ire as awe. I flew secret Defense Department missions, launched and repaired the Hubble Space Telescope, and walked in space. What more could a NASA fan ask? The bottom line is that *Shuttle* is a perplexing example of a computer-based simulation that completely succeeds on one level, but leaves me wishing for far more.

Virgin accomplished a Herculean task in the designing of *Shuttle*. Virtually every control panel and functional switch of NASA's Space Shuttle has been faithfully replicated in the simulation. That translates into literally hundreds of switches, dials, knobs, and instruments. At first glance, the sheer number and complexity of the controls is enough to give any but the most devoted detail freaks second thoughts about tackling the task at hand.

Fortunately, a number of well-engineered features makes getting around amidst the Shuttle's maze of controls quite manageable. Various hot keys let you jump from one control group to another, and large panel areas can be easily traversed by smooth auto-scrolling. Virgin includes a large, detailed, poster-sized road map of all of the Shuttle's control panels, eminently suitable for late-night study.

Even novices can find their way through this electronic forest by setting the simulation's auto-help level to maximum. At this level, one is automatically moved to the proper panel and switch whenever a control action is required, making it virtually impossible to make a mistake. There's no need for the razor-quick reactions required by today's most demanding jet simulators either. Although *Shuttle* operates in real time, control events occur at a reasonably leisurely pace, even when the simulation's flexible skip and jump-to options are heavily used.

Stunning visuals are an integral part of a true space buff's fascination with the Shuttle. Any shuttle fan worth



Shuttle *includes a brief but colorful VGA tour of the Space Shuttle's major subsystems. More complete information is contained in the 100+ page manual.*

his salt has seen the Omnimax films *Hail Columbia* and *Blue Planet*. The former brings all of the power and fury of a Shuttle liftoff to those who haven't been fortunate enough to witness one in person at Florida's Kennedy Space Center. The latter serves up visually breathtaking views of the Earth captured by special cameras carried aloft by the Shuttle expressly for the film.

Perhaps therein lies the source of my disappointment with the graphics and sound offered by Virgin's simulation. With the exception of about a dozen static screens, the program makes little use of high-end VGA graphics. There are no horizon or haze gradients, and overall image quality and detail of external views looks like vanilla EGA to this columnist.

Shuttle barely scratches the surface of the capabilities of today's PC sound boards. The program's packaging promises an original orchestral-quality soundtrack. There's a pleasantly upbeat musical theme at the program's intro screen, but after that the only noises you'll hear are decidedly pedestrian sound effects. The digitized ground-to-air chatter that would have been a natural in this simulation is noticeably absent: messages from Mission Control must be read off of the Shuttle's teleprinter.

Given all of the control panels and options available in *Shuttle*, it was probably inevitable that getting around within the simulation would be somewhat cumbersome. Although keyboard control in most of today's simulations tends to provide a less intrusive interface than it did in programs of just a few years ago, *Shuttle* is an exception to the rule. Many actions require awkward three-key combinations, making a mouse the preferable option.

Shuttle's documentation consists of a 100-plus page instruction manual and a mission objectives guide. At first blush they appear to be chock full of everything any budding Shuttle pilot could ask for. But while there are plenty of diagrams and technical details *describing* the major Shuttle subsystems, there's not enough instruction on how to use them.

The first mission involves landing the Shuttle on a desert runway after being lined up and released from a 747 "mothership." That should be a relatively easy task for someone who's an old hand at flight simulations, right? Due to the lack of a cogent description of the process in the manual, it took me nearly 20 attempts before I managed to touch down without scrambling the taxpayers' eggs on the runway. Unfortunately, *Shuttle*'s manuals are often short on advice, and the program's built-in help function doesn't include any context-sensitive hints or tips.

The second mission includes a manually controlled re-entry and landing approach. The docs contain some vague general descriptions about using the Shuttle's instrumentation to bring the bacon home by hand, but after six hours of unproductive experimentation, I decided to leave the friendly flying to the Digital Auto Pilots.

Shuttle did significantly enhance my understanding and appreciation of the nuts and bolts of flying the Space Shuttle. Now when I watch and/or listen to Shuttle missions on NASA cable, I'll know exactly what's going on, down to what switches are being thrown and what the gauges actually look like.

It's hard to avoid feeling guilty in faulting Virgin for *Shuttle*'s shortcomings. The scope of the simulation is so ambitious that the development team deserves an "A" for effort. I have no doubt that there's a potentially satisfying simulation lurking under *Shuttle*'s covers.

Virgin's first order of business should be to add a "Trainee Supplement" to the package. Simply watching things happen in full or intermediate auto modes is not enough to walk new users through complex tasks. The supplement should give novices all the information needed to complete operations — here we're talking about orbital maneuvering, manual landings, and space walking on their own. With that out of the way, upgraded graphics and sound, along with a simplified keyboard interface, will be all that's required to put this Shuttle aficionado in orbit.

GP

Get a new attitude and launch the Hubble Space Telescope while you're at it. A later mission let's you repair the HST as well.

LES MANLEY IN: LOST IN L.A.

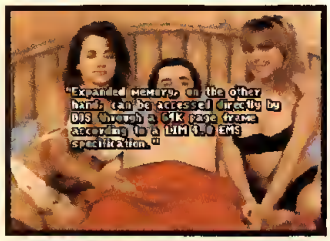
GARY MEREDITH

Blade seems very uncooperative at first, but if you know the right item to give him and the right name to call him, he can be quite helpful.

Some things never change, do they? When we last saw perennial-loser Lester P. Manley, he had just won WILL-TV's "Search for the King" contest by snapping a heavenly photo of the "King" himself. Les was all set to take his $1 million prize and enjoy the good things in life, but WILL-TV, where Les happened to be employed, didn't have the dough to make good on its word. So instead he took possession of WILL, circuitously reaching the top of the ladder after years of rewinding old videotapes. It was enough to make many of us renew our belief in Father Christmas and the Tooth Fairy.

Ah, but this is Les, remember? And in the tradition of all the great anti-heroes of computer gamedom, he took ownership of WILL just before it plunged into the nether regions of Chapter XI. Now, in *Les Manley in: Lost in L.A.*, Accolade's little nebbish is back on the streets, the streets of La La Land itself.

Les's old buddy, Helmut



We may never know the true story of how Les ended up here with the mud wrestlers — a little "tech talk" can go a long way.

Bean, a key character in Les's first adventure, *Search for The King*, has made a big name for himself as the number one movie star in Hollywood. But Helmut has earned quite a few enemies to go along with his newfound success, so it's no surprise that the diminutive Mr. Bean and his latest squeeze, the ravishing LaFonda Turner, wind up among the missing when a wave of kidnapping hits Tinseltown.

As you've almost certainly guessed, it's up to Les to find his old friend and discover who's behind the reign of terror in Hollywood Hills. This means talking to anyone who ever had anything to do with either Helmut or LaFonda. Make friends with Lance, the sun-stroked lifeguard, and you'll at least be able to get Cristy and Misty, two of Helmut's friends, to give you a few leads to get started with.

Les Manley in: Lost in L.A. has all the elements you'd want in a graphic adventure — raunchy humor, dead-on send-ups, and those fiendishly difficult "illogic" puzzles we've come to love and hate. While the names, the faces, and the packaging are unique, remember that at the heart of all games in this genre is one caveat: leave no stoned unturned. Make assumptions, and you won't solve the mystery. In every scene, there's nothing too trivial for your perusal.

In fact, as game graphics become more sophisticated — as is the case with the digitized

After discovering that Helmut has become the latest kidnapping victim, Les has a chat with Cristy and Misty at "The Pit."

Tex Murphy, the hard boiled gumshoe of MEAN STREETS, returns to your VGA screen in *MARTIAN MEMORANDUM*. Marshall Alexander, the president of TerraForm, hires Tex to find his missing daughter.

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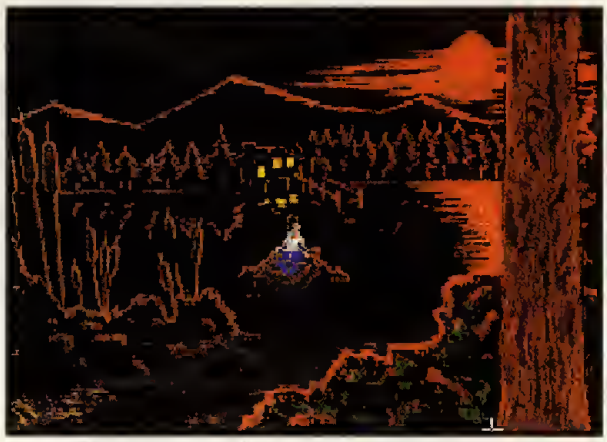


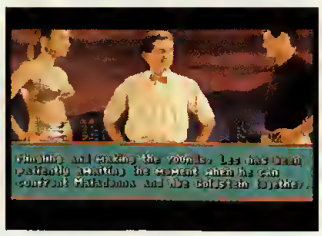
Keep telling yourself that this is Hollywood, and that things are hardly ever as they seem, especially on a studio set. Make sure you don't overlook anything during your session with Jason.

photos and handsome artwork in *Lost in L.A.* — more and more vital information is conveyed visually, so it's even more critical that nothing escapes your attention. For instance, unless you happen to be the owner of a new red Ferrari, you might not care what a passing pigeon happens to deposit on your windshield. But if you're determined to find Helmut, LaFonda, and several other missing celebrities, you might want to find some way to take possession of that gift from the heavens.

As a corollary to your stone turning, save your game often. In many games, this is required just to keep your character breathing from one scene to the next; in *Lost in L.A.*, it's really more for your convenience than for preventing the physical demise of Les. True, there are a couple of places where our boy could meet his maker, but it's more likely that you'll simply end the game prematurely.

An example of this is when Les is negotiating with Abe Goldstein on an offer to star in "The Les Manley Story" (they really are starved for good scripts in Hollywood, aren't they?). It's also wise to save the game often in case you have to retrace your steps after discovering you don't have the one item you need to complete the game — and this could easily happen.

If you've followed the evolution of graphic adventures, you're aware of just how much the "graphic" part of that label has improved recently. Most of the leading designers in this genre now work only in VGA, with lots of detailed artwork and digitized images taken from footage of live actors. While this has resulted in some truly breathtaking scenes, there's a downside to this sophistication. Designers seem to be concentrating more on the "gee whiz" quality of their graphics, and less on plots and puzzles.



It doesn't matter whom Les accuses first — Maladonna will still get stuffed into a mysterious car, with Les tailing her at a discreet distance.

Lost in L.A., though certainly entertaining and filled with some absolutely stunning graphic sequences, falls well short of the challenge found in its predecessor, *Les Manley in: Search for The King*. At times, it almost seems as if the game exists to serve the graphics.

The final confrontation takes place somewhere inside the wax museum, but only if Les can figure out a way to reanimate the recently waxed Helmut. By the way, don't forget to clean up after yourself.

There's a lot to do in the game, but it is, for the most part, very linear, with solutions to most problems more obvious than they should be. In some cases, solving puzzles is only a matter of patience and perseverance.

Some of the puzzles in the earlier game may have bordered on being totally illogical, but in this writer's opinion, it's better for designers to err on the perplexing side of the difficulty equation. The bottom line, then, is that *Les Manley in: Lost in L.A.* is a great introduction to graphic adventures, but a bit tame for veterans of the genre.

What *Lost in L.A.* might lack in complexity, though, it makes up for with excellent graphics, risque but good-natured humor, and a no-holds-barred view of the City of Angels. Only a few games are good enough to make you laugh out loud, and this is one of them.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA/MCGA graphics; hard drive recommended; 10-Mhz 286 or faster; supports all major sound boards; mouse recommended.

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MIXED UP FAIRY TALES

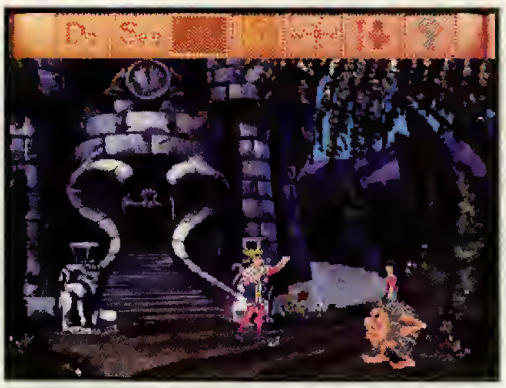
LESLIE MIZELL

Naturally, every fairy tale has a happy ending.

Game designer Lori Cole has sent adults on flights of fancy with her *Quest for Glory* games, and now she does the same for the younger generation. In Sierra's *Mixed Up Fairy Tales*, the follow-up to Roberta Williams' *Mixed Up Mother Goose*, players help characters from five fables — Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Beauty and the Beast, Snow White, and the Bremen Town Musicians — locate items vital to their stories.

Players (games can be saved for as many as 20 kids) first enter their names, then select one of six characters — boys and girls of different coloring or race — before jumping into the real adventure. By simply wandering through a walled town and around its immediate outskirts, the player meets characters, then enters into a sort of scavenger hunt to find the missing objects, stolen by a peculiar, fuzzy creature called Bookend.

Guiding players through *Mixed Up Fairy Tales* is a friendly dragon named Bookwyrm. If a player is having trouble locating Jack's bag of beans or the axe he needs to cut down the beanstalk, Bookwyrm can usually supply a helpful hint.



No sooner does Cinderella skip out on Prince Charming than the hedgehog-shaped Bookend steals her glass slipper.

The characters occasionally show a sense of humor ("Do you want the good news or the bad news?" the player asks before leading a lost, lovesick prince to Snow White, who's lying in her coffin) that won't go over youngsters' heads. There are also a few fun things to explore — you can sniff cake-scented flowers or make owls pop out of trees, for example.

Mixed Up Fairy Tales is probably best played by children with some reading and visual comprehension skills — although the vocabulary is even more basic than in *Mixed Up Mother Goose* — or by preschoolers who can play alongside an adult.

After you've delivered a rose to Beauty's father, you must find the girl and return her to Beast's castle.

But even more important than reading skills is a working knowledge of these five tales. Since you can literally send Cinderella to the ball, then walk over one screen to find the prince already picking up her slipper, it's easy for youngsters to get the plots confused. However, there's an illustrated storybook included with the game that includes complete versions of all the fairy tales.

Instead of using traditional children's tunes for the soundtrack, Cole has given each tale a score by a famous composer (notes on the musicians are included in the manual) as an added learning tool. For example, Snow White's visit to the dwarfs is accompanied by a tune from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, she lies in her glass-enclosed coffin as "Lacrimosa" from *The Funeral Mass* plays, and as she gets her kiss you hear strains from *The Marriage of Figaro*.

The music is fitting in a kind of ironic way, too. Poverty-stricken Jack regains his wealth and fells the giant to Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," and every time squat little Bookend appears, you hear Wagner's heroic "The Valkyries" from *Ring of the Nibelungen*. Like some of the puns in a Loony Tunes cartoon, this is more fun for the grownups than the kids.

But possibly the nicest thing about *Mixed Up Fairy Tales* is its unflagging encouragement of reading. The game may not come right out and say "now it's time to turn off the computer and go read a book," but its message is clear — and welcome.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA graphics (EGA/Tandy versions also available); hard drive required; 286 or faster recommended; supports major sound boards; mouse recommended.

Actual face-maker screens from *TSN*

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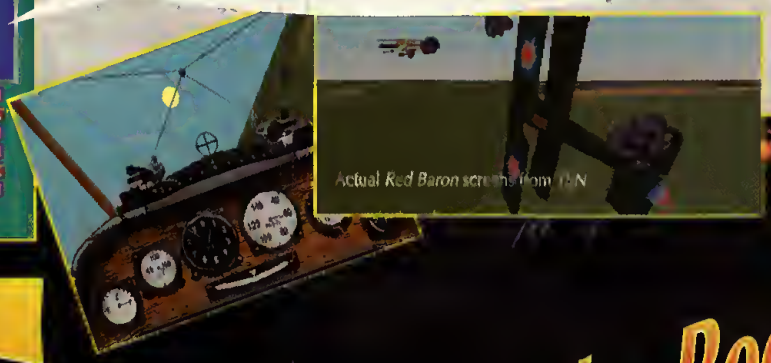

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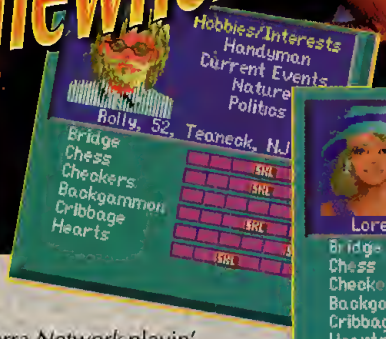

I'm tellin' ya, it all started with a bridge game. I was on *The Sierra Network* playin' with my regular buds, Rolly, Loretta, and Michael, when Rolly started sayin' how cool New Jersey was, and puttin' down Wisconsin.

I knew my only choice was to blow Rolly out of the sky. I challenged him to a game of *Red Baron*. Rolly took off in a Fokker tri-plane, and Michael was right behind him. I was in the air in a flash with Loretta covering my tail. I caught up to Rolly, and we were goin' at it hammer and tongs. Loretta came screamin' in from below, and I was, like, way bummed, because I wanted to blast Rolly myself. But suddenly Rolly pulled a slip-turn, choked his engine, and was all over Loretta like a bad haircut. She was history. It was just me and him. We were in tight, climbin' all the while. That sucker could turn on a dime, but my bi-plane was fast and mean. He almost got me, though. I was chasin' him when he spun around and went for me. Thinkin' fast, I climbed up, like I was runnin' away. He got excited and went for me. I spun hard to the right, and got him in my sights. I punched more holes in him than New Jersey has turnpike exits. I watched him spin out of sight, belchin' smoke and flames. Teach *him* to call me a cheesehead.

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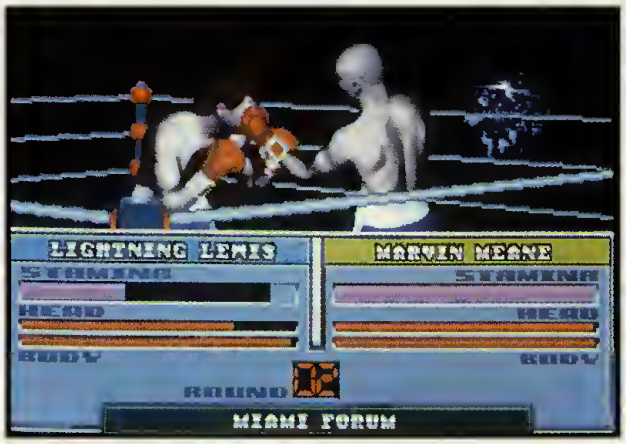
ABC'S WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS BOXING

STEPHEN POOLE

A digitized Dan Dierdorf is on hand to introduce each bout.

When we first loaded up this new Data East title, it looked as though it had the potential to replace Electronic Arts' *4D Boxing* as the heavyweight champ of PC boxing simulations. But *ABC's Wide World of Sports Boxing*, though unquestionably much more well-rounded than *4D Boxing*, fails to deliver in one crucial area — in the ring, where it counts the most.

You can start boxing right away in exhibition mode, but you'd do just as well to go ahead and start a career. The first step in Career mode is creating a fighter. After naming your boxer and assigning his vital stats, you begin to mold his appearance. Working with a handsomely digitized photo, you choose your boxer's hair style and color, skin tone, and trunks (all boxers appear to have the same body and facial structure, however).



These fighters look great, but the two-dimensional movement detracts from the realism.

Then it's time to get down to the nitty-gritty. Using a pool of 500 attribute points, you determine your boxer's strengths in various categories such as stamina, power, defense, chin (how well he takes blows to the head), body, cuts, and conditioning. How you use those 500 points depends on what kind of style you chose earlier: for example, there's no sense in wasting points on footwork if you're a brawler. Finally, you're given a pool of 40 percentage points to add to the minimum values of the three types of punches you can throw (jabs/straights, hooks/crosses, and uppercuts).

After you've "designed" your boxer, you're ready to pick up a manager and a trainer — but if you're a newcomer in *WWOSB*, you have no choice in these matters, since you can afford only the cheapest of the cheap. You can hire a new trainer when your current one's contract expires, and you can replace a manager at any point in your career, as long as you have enough money to cover the signing fee. Each manager has his (or her, in the case of the lovely and well-endowed Fifi Lamore) own strong points; but you can assume that the more you pay these guys, the better your fight purses and physical conditioning will be.

So far, so good. Up to this point *WWOSB* touches on so many details, and brings so many normally behind-the-scenes factors to light, that it's safe to say that *WWOSB* offers the most comprehensive look at all the components involved in pursuing a career in the fight game. But once you begin your first fight, the aura of realism that's been created starts to fade.

Matches are presented as if they were televised, with none other than Dan Dierdorf introducing the bout. The "Tale of the Tape" which precedes a fight might show you being 5 inches taller than your opponent and possessing an 8-inch advantage in reach, but once you climb into the ring both fighters appear to be physically identical.

Each round starts with a graphically weak overhead view, which switches to a side view when it's time to mix it up. Your boxer *always* appears on the left, and in the two-dimensional arena of *WWOSB*, there's no way to dodge or weave — you can move toward or away from your opponent, but not left or right.

The digitized boxers *look* great. But looks aren't everything, especially in boxing, and the animation during the fight is choppy and unconvincing, even on a 386/25. Landing a punch depends more on your opponent's posture than your timing or combinations: if you and your opponent are in the same stance (standing or crouched), there's a 99 percent chance your punch won't connect. All in all, it's just not realistic.

WWOSB supports sound boards, but they're used only during the intro — all the digitized grunts and yells during a fight are heard through the PC speaker.

So there you have it. *WWOSB* "cuddah been a contendah," but it doesn't have what it takes to convince this PC fight fan that he's really in the ring.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA graphics; 10-Mhz computer of faster recommended; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Roland, and Tandy 3-voice sound cards; joystick recommended.

BO JACKSON BASEBALL

LANCE ELKO

With runners at the corners, the batter takes a swing. Just as in real life, timing is critical if you want to make good contact.

Scheduled for release in the fall of 1990, *Bo Jackson Baseball* arrived just before Christmas, 1991. Despite the long delay, this Data East title is a solid simulation that competes well with the current crop of baseball games.

Like most other baseball simulations, *Bo* has something for both the arcade player and the would-be manager. And you can play a single game or an entire 162-game season with teams representing all 26 major-league franchises.

The arcade game lets you select team, starting lineup, opposing team, and one of three stadiums in which to play. Batting and fielding are straightforward — as in real baseball, timing is everything. (The stats of the hitter or fielder *do* affect your success.)

The method of pitching is unique. You can throw a fast ball, change-up, or breaking ball, but you can't determine how high or low the pitch is. For horizontal pitch location, *Bo* employs a unique scheme in which a ball moves rhythmically back and forth behind the plate. When this ball is positioned where you want to throw, press the appropriate key or joystick button. To pitch on the inside part of the plate to a left-handed hitter, for example, wait until the indicator ball is on the right corner of the plate, and throw. The system feels a bit odd at first, but you get used to it quickly.

Bo is not licensed by Major League Baseball, so if you're interested in simulating major-league play, be prepared to spend time editing data. Uniform colors are generally correct, and team names — which can be edited — correspond to the cities and divisions where the real teams play (e.g., Chicago East, wearing blue and white, is the NL East Cubs).

At first glance, you'll notice that team rosters are filled with fictitious last names. Edit the rosters, however, and you'll see the correct *first* names of all players from the *1990* season. For example, in the New York West (Mets) roster, you'll find that the right fielder, Davis, has 37 home runs, 108 RBIs, and the first name of Daryl. Check the stats of the '90 Mets right fielder in a baseball encyclopedia, and you'll see a perfect match. Delete D-A-V-I-S and insert S-T-R-A-W-B-E-R-R-Y.

Oddly, quite a few of the players' stats do not match up with their real '90 year-end figures. For example, Ryne Sandberg's numbers seem to be extracted from somewhere around mid-season; and Bo, who played for the Royals in '90, is on Chicago West — his '91 team, the White Sox — with highly inflated stats.

Select League Play and you can edit player stats, create lineups, and name a pitching rotation for any or all teams, then begin a new 162-game season. The computer will play out games on the schedule automatically, report final scores, and update standings in each division. You can opt for one or more human-controlled games on any day's schedule if you like.

The graphics and animation in *Bo* are quite good. Sound, on the other hand, is rudimentary. An announcer with a small vocabulary ("strike," "ball," "grounder," etc.) is heard via the PC speaker throughout the game, and there's a bit of music for those with a supported sound card.

Head to the team roster to make lineups, seasonal pitching rotations, or substitutions.

The post-game report is completely generic — after getting thoroughly trounced the first time I played, the show host summarized: "What a thrilling game! Detroit defeats Baltimore, 20 to 2!"

Nitpicking aside, this is a good game that deserves the attention of baseball fans.

GP

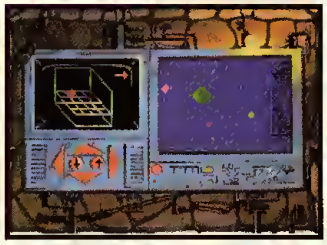
Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA, EGA, or Tandy graphics; hard drive recommended; supports Roland, Sound Blaster, Ad Lib, and Tandy sound cards; joystick recommended.

CASTLE OF DR. BRAIN

LESLIE MIZELL

Just because Sierra claims that *The Castle of Dr. Brain* was designed for ages 12 to adult, don't think your child will romp right through it. If your younger teen *can* complete *Dr. Brain*, maybe he or she can give *you* a hand as you work through this entertaining strategy/puzzle game.

The framework for this puzzle-fest is clever and well-developed. You've applied for the position of lab assistant to the eccentric Dr. Brain. But as soon as you arrive at his wacky castle, you find he has an unusual interview planned: You must travel throughout his castle, finding solutions to all sorts of brain-teasers, ranging from hangman and word-search puzzles to problems involving binary math and electrical circuitry.



On the novice level, the mazes are shown in a 3-D map (left), which you can alternate with a 2-D overhead view, and in a first-person perspective (right). In standard mode, you only see the 2-D map, and you can't access a map at expert level.

The castle is divided into different wings, each with three or so puzzle rooms on a single floor. After completing a floor, you must travel through a four-floor maze to reach the next wing. The maze is itself devilish, since you must search blind alleys for elevators until you reach the exit.

The jigsaw puzzle is a much-needed respite in Dr. Brain. *The only real difference in the three levels is the size of the puzzle pieces. Listen for a "click" that tells you a piece has been correctly placed.*

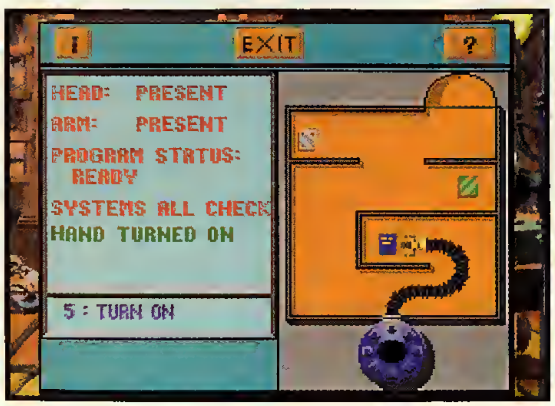
It says a lot for *Dr. Brain* that sometimes the easiest puzzles can be the most exasperating. The Simon puzzle that unlocks the front door may be simple, but the sliding puzzle in the hallway is maddening. You can obtain a clue or partial solution for each problem, but only if you have a hint coin. And you get the coins, naturally, by solving puzzles.

You can play *Dr. Brain* on three skill levels — novice, standard, and expert. Unlike most games of this kind, it's fun to play *Dr. Brain* on all three levels, starting with novice and working upward. If you play all three versions, you can see how the difficulty evolves for the various problems, and you can also make the *very* demanding expert mode a little easier.

For example, in the robot-programming sequence, you must use robots to pick up three items sealed in a glass case. There are three robots at your disposal: one who always tells the truth, one who always lies, and one who alternates between truths and lies. On the easiest level, you can simply find the robot who always tells the truth, then program him to pick up all three objects. Make sure you keep your notes — you must use *two* robots in the standard level and all *three* in the expert mode. It's a lot easier simply to reverse or alternate your original programs instead of writing new, totally askew procedures (which is tougher than it sounds) for the two robots who lie.

Dr. Brain is less about acquiring new knowledge than it is about applying things you already know. In the planetarium, for instance, you don't learn the planets in our solar system — you need to already know them. And, again, the game might easily frustrate young teens working alone. But all in all, *Dr. Brain* is wickedly good fun for your cranium.

GP



Although you can program the truth-telling robot to pick up all three objects in the novice level of the robot-programming game, the standard game requires you to use either the lying robot or alternating robot for one of the objects. On the expert level, you must program all three robots.

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA graphics (EGA/Tandy version available); hard drive required; 286 or better required; supports all major sound boards; mouse highly recommended.

D/GENERATION

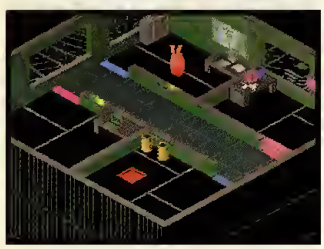
STEPHEN POOLE

On the opening page of the manual for *D/Generation*, special thanks are given to Jordan Mechner, the man who brought us the classic *Prince of Persia*. After playing the game compulsively for several hours, I think I may know why designer Robert Cook acknowledged Mechner. Despite its completely different setting and more involved game play, *D/Generation* is, at its core, a 21st-century *Prince of Persia*.

In this arcade-action/puzzle game from **Software Toolworks**, you're a courier carrying a top-secret package to Derrida, head scientist at Genoq Biolabs. Unknown to you, Derrida has been experimenting with Neogens — genetically engineered organisms, extremely stealthy and designed to kill on sight.

When you arrive at the lab, you find the receptionist hiding behind her desk. The building's security system has been activated, and you soon discover why: something has gone seriously wrong with Derrida's experiments, and the lethal Neogens are roaming the building. Like the receptionist, there are other survivors hiding throughout the building. It's pretty obvious that Derrida needs that package PDQ.

So how is this similar to *Prince of Persia*, where you played a hero who must escape from his cell in a dungeon in order to rescue a princess in peril? For one thing, you fight your way from the 80th floor to Derrida's lab on the 90th floor, just as you had to work you way from the basement dungeon to the top of the palace in *Prince of Persia*. Although you'll be blasting hostile organisms, there's just as much challenge in figuring out how to open doors and passageways in order to progress to the next level — again similar to *Prince of Persia*. The animated movements of the different onscreen characters are clearly inspired by Mechner's work, moving in such a way as to make you believe that you're watching real people. And like *Prince of Persia*, you have a limited time in which to complete your task.



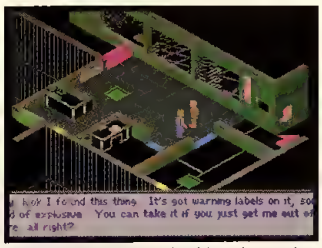
The A/Generation, the first Neogen Derrida developed, smothers its victims.

But don't get the idea that *D/Generation* isn't unique and rewarding in its own right. *D/Generation* is proof positive that less is indeed more, that you don't need complicated instructions or digitized photos to be totally sucked into a game environment.

You begin the game unarmed, but it's not long before you discover a laser pulse-gun. You also find other weapons in unlabeled boxes, and some of the survivors you meet have goodies, like bombs and shields, that are essential to your survival.

The pulse-gun can be used for a lot more than defense. For one reason or another, you often can't physically reach the buttons that open doors or deactivate the building's security system, but a short blast from your pulse-gun will do the job nicely.

In many games where you move an onscreen character, you may as well being moving an inanimate object: there's nothing to make you *believe* that it's really you dodging death and disaster. But not so here: there are a score of delightful touches that help you suspend your disbelief and identify with the little man dashing around on your monitor.



Besides providing valuable information on the happeings at Genoq, survivors often carry weapons essential to your success.

This hallucinatory scene reveals the truth about D/Generation, Derrida's most advanced — and deadly — Neogen.

The survivors you rescue, for example, embody the widely varying emotions you'd expect from people who have just been saved from a deadly situation. Some are slightly wacky from their ordeal; some evince "whistle in the dark" humor; some are bitter and uncooperative.

In one of the most touching scenes in the game, a woman you save is about to leave the room — but then she turns around and blows you a kiss before making her way to safety. It's enough to hook even the most jaded gamer.

The only real criticism of *D/Generation* is that it seems a bit short. Then again, that might be because after playing nonstop to the game's conclusion, I was ready for ten more levels. And there aren't many compliments better than that.

GP

Hardware requirements: 512K minimum memory; VGA, EGA, CGA, or Hercules graphics; supports AdLib and Sound Blaster sound cards; supports joystick.

ECO-SAURUS

LESLIE EISER

This is a rather charming environmental adventure game from **First Byte** starring a lovable Megasaurus named Zug. Zug and his friends live on Eco Island, a polluted piece of ground inhabited by friendly dinosaurs, talking rocks, and even a pair of chatty cacti.

When an alien named M-Kar crashes his spaceship in Elasmosaurus Lake, Zug decides to help him rebuild it. Things look bleak until Zug remembers that he had just been reading the plans for a do-it-yourself recycling machine. Maybe they could use Eco Island's garbage to make the needed parts!

Your job, as newly appointed Eco-saurus (that's dino talk for Environmental Conservation Officer) is to travel around Eco Island, gathering and sorting the garbage as you go. When you fill a portable bin (there's one each for recyclable aluminum, plastic, paper, glass, and organic waste), you must race back to the recycling center to let Zug's machine transform the waste into the parts needed to repair M-Kar's spaceship.

If you manage to clean up the whole island and can sweet-talk Mr. Bronto into cutting down on his outrageous consumption of water and electricity, M-Kar and Zug will complete the repairs to the spaceship. In the final scene, if you've been successful, M-Kar blasts off the island during a triumphant eruption of Mount Rex, the volcanic source of Eco Island's geothermic power.

Besides learning to sort garbage, an obviously valuable skill in today's ecologically aware households, kids playing *Eco-Saurus* can also pick up lots of useful recycling tips. Animated objects — which include tree stumps, golf courses, and statues — offer bits of ecological advice. There's even a quiz in the back of the manual that can be used as a starting point for household discussions, or just to find out how many facts your child has retained.

The colorful VGA graphics and the delightful synthesized speech of the dinosaurs, rocks, and signs are absolutely entrancing to young children. While the program supports a variety of sound boards, the quality of synthesized speech doesn't seem to depend on the price of the board (the Covox Speech Thing and the Ad Lib board give similar results).

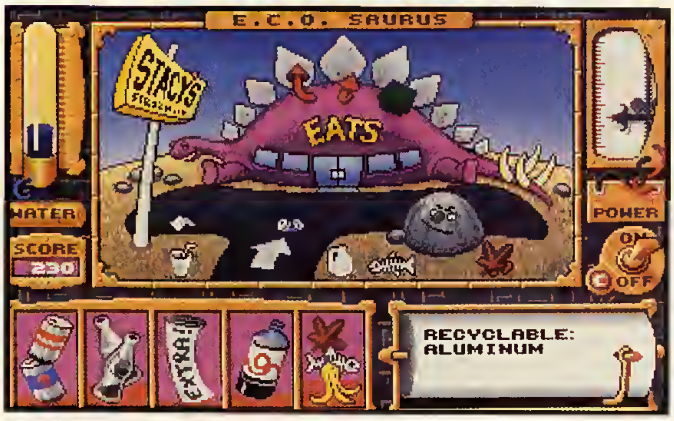
On a slow computer, however, the publishers suggest turning off the speech completely. Non-readers can still play the game without speech, but they obviously won't learn the ecological tips proffered by the animated objects. The attractive interface supports the use of keyboard or mouse, and is simple enough to suit the target age group of 4 to 9. The educational content of the game is acceptable, although perhaps a trifle exaggerated (even the fountains in front of the EcoCenter have to be shut down to save water).

Zug's recycling machine does wonders with garbage. It can transform waste into a body part for M-Kar's broken spaceship.

Unfortunately for users of *Eco-Saurus*, sorting garbage is not sufficiently entertaining to make the game worth playing more than once. Worse, only one player's game can be saved at a time, so two children trying to play at different times will run into trouble.

Overall, *Eco-Saurus* is a welcome start in the right direction on this topic. For households interested in environmentally focused children's software, *Eco-Saurus* is a decent package, but it's not a great one.

GP



Eco Island is a mess — look at the junk lying around near Stacy Stegosaurus' Steak House. Your job is to get busy picking it up.

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; 8 MHz minimum clockspeed; hard drive recommended; MCGA, VGA, or EGA graphics; supports Ad Lib, Sound Blaster, Covox Speech Thing, IBM Speech Adapter, IBM ACPA, and speech chips for Tandy 1000/2500 and IBM PS/1; supports mouse.

JIMMY CONNORS PRO TENNIS TOUR

MATTHEW A. FIRME

Considered at its most basic level — a ball smacked back and forth between two racquets — you'd think tennis would be an easy sport to bring to computer gaming. But tennis becomes *Pong* if simply executed at that level, and the subtlety and personality that have made tennis such a long-lived and popular sport are lost.

Although past tennis simulations have taken the concept far beyond *Pong*, none to date has captured as much of the real thing as **Ubi Soft**'s *Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour*.

Jimmy Connors lets you compete in real pro tennis tournaments all over the world, from the Australian Open to Wimbledon, and includes many lesser-known events in between. There are so many tournaments, in fact, that you can't play in all of them; many are held at the same time in different countries, so you have to make choices. Do you attend a Grand Slam event, or opt for tournaments lacking the prestige — and world-class opponents — you'd face in the more famous events?

Decisions like this give *Jimmy Connors* a kind of role-playing feel. Your character is rated in a variety of skill levels, and in Tournament mode these skills improve as you use them successfully. By entering smaller tournaments, which afford better odds of victory, you can improve your player's skills, ranking, and dollar earnings. You actually build a career, with the ultimate goal of winning those Grand Slam events and becoming the number one player in the world.

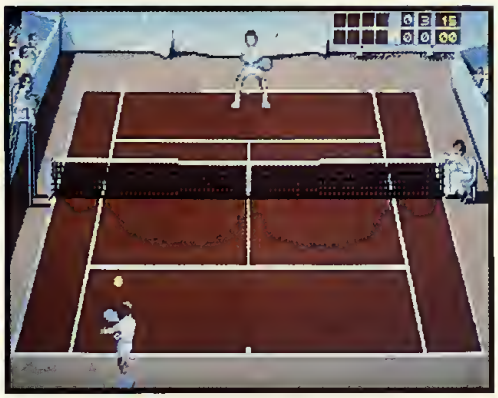
You can customize your player's skills by allocating 64 skill points as you see fit. Be sure to strengthen your forehand, backhand, and serve. Conditioning is also important.

Fortunately, you don't have to leap into the pressures of professional play to enjoy yourself. You can always opt for a friendly match against an equally rated computer opponent, honing your skills without risk to your pro career. You can even practice specific strokes with the help of a ball machine, working those fundamentals until they become second nature.

While the tournament mode adds a lot to the game, it's on the court that *Jimmy Connors* really shines. The action is smooth and realistic, and the joystick interface is among the best we've seen. You maneuver your player into position with the joystick, then press and hold the button to draw your racquet back in preparation for your return. The longer you hold the button, the harder you'll hit the ball. You aim the shot with the joystick while holding the button, sending lobs, drops, and passing shots to the left or right. With just a bit of practice you'll be able to serve and volley with the best players.

Connors isn't perfect, though. While the game offers many options and statistics, they're often difficult to find. The menus used to access features and information aren't as clear as they could be, and the game's documentation isn't much help. And although the action is very realistic, the game offers only two different on-screen characters — one female, one male. Even during a doubles match, you watch what seems to be a set of identical quadruplets or, at best, two pairs of twins. A bit of visual variety would have been nice. Don't make the mistake of trying to toggle the sound during a game: on several computers we tried that on, the game (and the computer) froze up.

But these complaints are minor when you consider the game in its entirety. *Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour* is a terrific sports game — enjoyable, realistic, and complex. It delivers great on-court action, with the added extra of a comprehensive and believable tour mode. For tennis fans, this is a must-have game. And if you're not a tennis fan, *Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour* may be just the thing to convert you.



The action is smooth, realistic, and fast-paced. Don't be afraid to rush to the net, but be ready to back up if your opponent lobs one over your head.

GP

Hardware Requirements: 640K required; VGA, EGA, CGA, or Tandy graphics; supports Ad Lib and Sound Blaster sound cards; joystick recommended.

LOGICAL

LESLIE MIZELL

On the Nice Colors level, color stoppers prevent you from sending some colors of marbles into certain dials.

The most complicated thing about *Logical*, a new strategy game from Rainbow Arts, is its instruction manual. Printed in German, English, French, and Italian, it's probably not clear in any language. Certainly the English-language version took some deciphering.

But once you figure out what's going on, you can spend a lot of time with *Logical*. It's one of those each-time-you-play-you-get-a-little-better games that's great to while away a few minutes. Or a few hours. Or even a few days.

The purpose of *Logical* is to match four like-colored marbles — red, blue, green, or yellow — in a dial-shaped receptacle. Once the marbles are in place, they explode out of the dial, freeing it to use again. Once you've caused an explosion on every dial in a stage, you move on to the next level.

This traffic light indicates that you must fill a dial with yellow marbles first, followed by blue, then green. The square color blocks change the colors of marbles that roll through them; the round color blocks are color stoppers.

Of course, the dials are configured in devious ways and are joined by intricate tunnels and ramps. There are obstacles in your path as well: stoppers that let only one color of marble through, one-way signs so you can't back up, traffic lights that require you to proceed in a certain order, and a handicap color combination you must match before any dials can explode.

Most importantly, there's a pesky time limit for almost every stage. You're never sure exactly how long you have — instead, you must trust the on-screen hourglass as it ticks away the pixels. It seems, however, that the designers were careful in deciding time limits. Most stages can be finished *just* under the buzzer, with only a few grains of sand remaining.

You may be fooled into thinking that *Logical* is a very friendly game, because in many ways it is. Not only do you have enough time to complete most stages (unless you miss a dial and then can't decide which one you haven't blown up yet — and this *will* happen to you), but you also begin the game with three extra marbles so you can continue the game even after you've failed to complete a stage. You also receive a password for each level so that you can jump back into action after you've lost your marbles, so to speak, or quit playing for a while.

However, there are some stages in this 99-level game that are nearly impossible to finish unless you have the reflexes of a safari animal. And since there isn't a stage-select feature, you may never get past the first fourth of *Logical*.

Start saving yellow and red marbles in the More Islands level. Send the red marbles into the transporter on the left and the yellow marbles into the transporter on the right. You must fill six dials with just these two colors.

The graphics are crisp and functional, and you can set the background color and board design that suits you best. There's also an editing feature that allows you to design your own *Logical* boards, complete with obstacles, ramps, and dials — but you can access it only when you've completed all 99 levels. The editing feature also allows you to modify existing levels.

Logical won't appeal to everyone. If you're looking for fast action, try another game. If you don't want a game that requires intense concentration, look somewhere else. But the organized, analytical... well, *logical* game player is really going to enjoy *Logical*.

GP

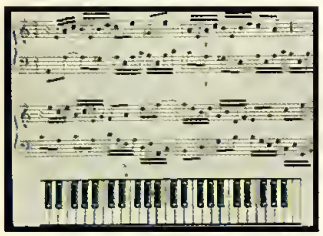
Hardware Requirements: 512K minimum memory; VGA or EGA graphics; mouse recommended.

THE MIRACLE PIANO TEACHING SYSTEM

RICHARD MANSFIELD

"Miracle" might be too strong a word, but **The Software Toolworks**' *Miracle Piano Teaching System* does an excellent job of introducing and teaching piano to people of all ages.

The Miracle is a four-octave synthesizer with 128 sampled instruments, along with the software you load into your PC. Although most of the samples are adequate to the purpose, some are quite short (the cymbal, for instance, is limited to instant damping — "Tst" instead a delayed "Tsssssssss..."). But in a unit with a street price of under $400 — plus the excellent software, which gives the package much of its appeal — you can't expect the world's highest fidelity.



The graphics are crisp and pleasing, especially on a Super VGA monitor.

There are, too, tradeoffs in the hardware. The sustain pedal, for example, is actually a piece of sponge cut out in the shape of a pedal. Perhaps the most eccentric design decision — one that seems even more odd when you consider that many of *The Miracle*'s users are likely to be children — was to tightly sandwich the on-off switch between the power cord plug and a fragile pedal connector. This isn't *dangerous*, but it is awkward.

The synthesizer is multitimbral (it can play more than one instrument at a time); eight notes can be played at once (with some of the simpler sounds, 16); the keyboard responds properly to varying pressure on the keys, the sounds becoming softer the more lightly you strike a key; and it's fully MIDI compatible with jacks, so it can be used with other computer programs, or controlled by other synthesizers.

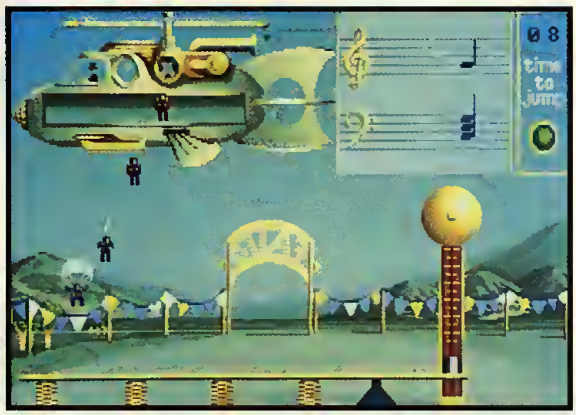
But you're not buying an orchestra in a box here. You're buying a teaching system, and that's where *The Miracle* comes close to deserving its name. The graphics are excellent, particularly on a VGA screen; the program is quite thoughtful, easily navigated, and rich with options; and the teaching — though we have no statistics — seems to work.

With all kinds of helpful visual and aural feedback, with pacing that matches your rate of improvement, and with games, concerts, and other diversions, you or your child is likely to be drawn back again and again. It's about as painless a way to learn to play the piano as we've ever experienced.

In the shooting gallery game, for instance, ducks come across the screen riding a note position on the staff. If you play the right note, the duck gets hit. Then you're given a score and asked to play the game again if you really embarrassed yourself.

Lessons cover the whole gamut of piano instruction — rhythm, sight reading, tempo, and, of course, plenty of practice. What makes *The Miracle* superior to traditional approaches is precisely what makes computers, at their best, superior to typewriters, adding machines, and other now-outdated machinery: it interacts with the user in a powerfully flexible and personal fashion.

The program shows you what to play, plays it for you, then watches attentively while you practice, looking for up to 200 kinds of errors. It is highly sensitive to your progress, and quite effective at helping you overcome problems — patiently suggesting alternatives, providing new and appropriate practice sessions. When you've mastered one of the pieces, you're allowed into the Concert Hall to show off what you've learned, accompanied by orchestral backing from *The Miracle* itself.



Several games entertain while they instruct. Get this chord just right, or these parachutists will pay for your mistake.

The Miracle is highly recommended for would-be keyboardists of any age just starting out at the piano, and for anyone who wants to brush up on technique or learn sight reading. The software is so cleverly designed, so well-balanced between learning and entertainment, that you'll understand, perhaps for the first time, the dual meaning of "playing" the piano.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA, EGA, CGA, or Hercules graphics display; one serial port available; hard drive recommended; mouse supported.

NIGEL'S WORLD:
ADVENTURES IN GEOGRAPHY

LESLIE EISER

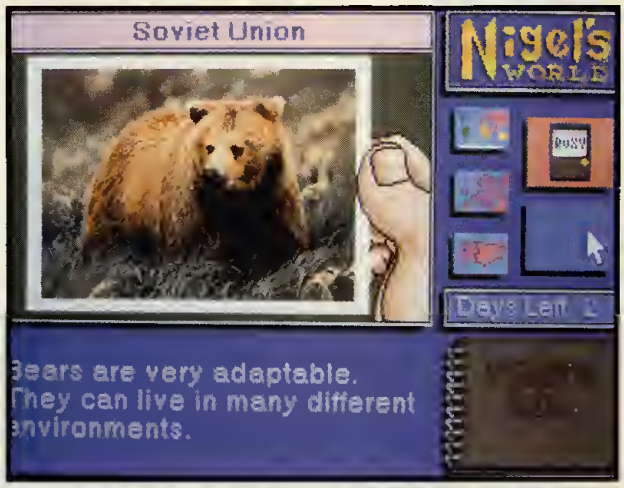
Nigel is a good-natured Scotsman whose goal in life is to win first place in a photography contest. To that end, he's joined the staff at PHIG (Photographers Interested in Geography) and is traveling the world looking for adventure. Your job is to help him figure out where to go, and which photographs to take. If you do both jobs correctly, Nigel will be congratulated by Roxy, the chief executive at PHIG, and might even be promoted to Master Photographer.

With 4 levels to try, 30 countries to visit, and 90 digitized photos waiting for you to take, *Nigel's World*, from Lawrence Productions, offers plenty to keep you busy. Accept an assignment for Nigel at the Shutterbug level and you use the world map to locate specific continents. After clicking on a continent, you're shown an environmental map of that continent with blue rivers winding their way through brown mountains, green grasslands, and dark green forests. Choose from the three Photo Op locations, then use Nigel's camera to snap the picture.

After you receive your assignment by fax and decide where to go (which continent is Brazil in anyway?), you'd better get moving. You have only 13 days to get those pictures back to Roxy.

As the photograph slowly develops before your eyes, take a minute to read the description of your location (this is critical to success at the Master level). Give your photo to Roxy and go home — you'll get another assignment shortly.

Each of Nigel's assignments require that you help him find specific countries. Once there, use the Photo Op buttons to select individual locations and snap away. If you get lost, try asking the Klooculator for a hint, or simply use trial and error. The worst that can happen is that you'll run out of time and disappoint Roxy. She'll fuss and then send you home to try again.



Check out that magnificent coat. Bet it keeps him warm all winter!

At the Master's level, the game really gets challenging. Instead of locating one of 30 countries, you search for one of 90 particular locations. You have to find the continent, country, and exact geographical location of important sites like St. Basil's Cathedral, the Temple of Tulum, or the Fort of St. John — a tough task, but not impossible if you've been paying attention all along. Rack up 12 successful trips as a Master Photographer, and Nigel wins his coveted Diamond Tripod award for best photographer.

A bonus in the game is the collection of folk songs and digitally recorded greetings from each country. You can listen to the greetings with a Sound Blaster card, and to the music with either a Sound Blaster or an Ad Lib.

Despite a few very minor problems, *Nigel's World* succeeds in teaching basic map skills with a lot of relatively painless drill. *Nigel's World* is slow-moving yet visually very attractive, demanding a reasonable amount of reading skill and little manual dexterity.

Colorful environmental maps of each country indicate the location of three Photo Ops. Here you can take pictures of people, animals, or landmarks.

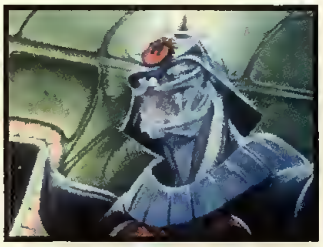
Visually oriented youngsters with an interest in music will find *Nigel's World* very appealing. But kids more accustomed to arcade thrills and high-speed action games will probably be disappointed in the stately pace of this game.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA, MCGA graphics only; supports Ad Lib and Sound Blaster; supports mouse.

NOVA 9

JEFF LUNDRIGAN



Gir Draxon is back — and he's about as merciful and kind as he is pretty.

It's been two years since the defeat of Gir Draxon, the Supreme Arcturan Overlord who set out to conquer the universe in *Stellar 7*. The long and terrible war on Stellar 7 finally culminated in Draxon's defeat — but when it was over, his body was nowhere to be found.

If that's not an open invitation to a sequel, nothing is. And sure enough, Gir Draxon is back, nastier than ever, in *Nova 9* from Dynamix. But while Draxon may be bigger and badder, his new starring vehicle doesn't differ too much from its predecessor.

That's not too say there's nothing in *Nova 9* you wouldn't find in *Stellar 7*. There's a great introductory sequence, something *Stellar 7* lacked, which shows what happened to Draxon (the scene where he incinerates two *very* cute extraterrestrials is priceless). And this time around you're assisted in your mission to halt Draxon by SARAH (Synergistic Advanced Resource-Aesthetic Hybrid) — a computer developed by Sarah Alex, the wife you lost during the war on Stellar 7. But when it comes to basic game play, things haven't changed much — you travel from planet to planet, fighting Draxon's forces in an attempt to reach the power-hungry madman himself.

Of course, just because a sequel doesn't differ radically in game play from its predecessor doesn't mean it's not good. The trouble here is that in trying to update and improve things, all the designers managed to do is saddle *Nova 9* with problems that you won't find in the much more straightforward *Stellar 7*.

You're equipped with the Raven II, a top-of-the-line main battle tank of the Terran fleet. In addition to a powerful Bi-Phasal cannon and mine-dropping unit, the Raven is equipped with eight "modular expansion units." These units are capable of picking up and utilizing power modules left behind after you destroy certain enemy ships.

These power modules are actually odd-looking geometric objects, and by picking these up the tank is given a temporary boost. Some modules increase the Raven II's performance — either in speed, firepower, or maneuverability — while others give the tank special weapons or handy items like limited invulnerability. In *Stellar 7*, there was some order to this whole business of power-ups. The manual gave a list of possible types of modules and what enemies to destroy to find one, but you've no such luck in *Nova 9*, — you're on your own.

Whether you see this as a problem, of course, is partly a matter of taste. The added element of discovery will be a bonus to some folks, but the number of different modules is large and confusing, especially since they all look pretty much alike. And although some modules can be stored for later use, others take effect the second you pick them up (SARAH does tell you when you've picked one of these up, but in the heat of battle it's difficult to read her onscreen message). Frankly, *Nova 9* is difficult enough without this kind of trial and error, even in the "easy" mode.

To be sure, *Nova 9* does have its good points. It may not be an especially *great* game, but it's certainly not all bad. The graphics are every bit as excellent as you've come to expect from Dynamix, and even if you don't play it on a really hot system the animation is relatively smooth (although a faster machine is still a good idea).

Essentially, it seems as if the designers tried *too* hard to make *Nova 9* the ultimate game in the series. It is possible to overcomplicate things, especially with such a straightforward "shoot everything that moves" kind of game.

GP

One thing you can't fault the game on are its graphics, which really are state of the art.

Hardware requirements: 640K (768K for Tandy 16-h/d Color), hard disk required; supports VGA, EGA, Tandy 16-Color, Thunderboard, Ad Lib, Ro-land MT-32/Lapc-1/ CM-32L, Sound Blaster. 286 or better recommended; supports joystick and mouse.

SHADOW SORCERER

BERNARD YEE

This new AD&D release from SSI amazingly eschews the first-person perspective that's been adopted by so many cavern-crawl games of late. Instead, SSI has opted for what it calls an "isometric" graphic presentation — an oblique, cutaway view of the world similar to the perspective used in the combat screens of SSI's Gold Box series, and in Electronic Arts' *The Immortal*.

This game takes place in the Dragonlance world, picking up after *Heroes of the Lance* and *Dragons of Flame*. In *Shadow Sorcerer* you play a sort of Moses, leading the slaves you rescued in *Dragons of Flame* away from Pax Tharkas, the fortress of the evil Verminaard and his draconian henchthings. You control characters already established in Dragonlance, with a four-member vanguard -- Tanis, Raistlin, Sturm, and Goldmoon, for instance -- scouting the way to the promised land.

A fireball is an incredibly effective pest-control device, but unless you like your heroes well-done, be careful of range limitations and obstacles which can cause premature detonation.

The members of your party don't begin as first-level characters -- Sturm, for instance, begins this game at eighth level — and have personalities which may or may not complement each other. Character creation and level advancement is not the name of this game — spells don't get more potent than third or fourth level. And don't expect much interaction with non-player characters.

You start out with a geographic overhead hex map of the lands south of Pax Tharkas, with your party leading the escaped slaves. A point-and-click interface is used for movement — just click on the hex you'd like to walk to. Of course, your small party moves faster than the refugees, so it's your duty to find shelter and food for the refugees, as well as protection from the nasties that roam the wilderness.

Although you'll have random encounters with monsters, your main worry is the pursuing forces of Pax Tharkas. But while it's important that you move quickly, you should still stop to investigate various areas which contain garden-variety AD&D monsters and their often-valuable treasures. You'll also do well to address the council of refugees to ensure they continue following you.

Tactical combat is the focal point of the *Shadow Sorcerer* — if you're the type of player who prefers to wander at your leisure, you'll easily wind up dragon fodder. When combat occurs, the game switches to the isometric view. All the characters are animated, and the graphics are good, if not mind-blowing. Still, it's hard to tell the monsters apart from one another, as they are a bit small.

Clicking on a character gives you the option to fight, move, pick up items, or cast spells. Combat takes place in real time — this may be more "realistic" than round-based combat in which you have time to ponder each character's action, but it also subjects you to the idiosyncracies of the interface. *Shadow Sorcerer* provides an auto-combat feature, but we found that it often resulted in a party member walking right into the blast radius of a fireball.

Disturb a pirate's chest, and the dead buccaneers who once guarded it will rise up to surround your party.

One of the more user-friendly features of *Shadow Sorcerer* is that your characters don't die — they get zapped back to the refugee party with one hit point. You can choose another character from the 16 available to take his or her place, or you can recruit your recently fallen comrade and heal him right up again.

All in all, *Shadow Sorcerer* is noteworthy for its excellent interface, and an effective and economic graphics system which proves that an excellent gaming engine doesn't require 20 megs of hard drive space. And *Shadow Sorcerer* has a fair degree of replayability, since your success depends on how many slaves survive the exodus.

Although *Shadow Sorcerer* could benefit from some true role-playing elements -- character creation, level advancement, and a gripping story — players who enjoy real-time, arcade-like RPGs will find many hours of fun here.

GP

Hardware requirements: 420K minimum memory; VGA, EGA, CGA, or Tandy graphics; supports Ad Lib, Roland, and Sound Blaster sound cards; supports mouse and joystick (mouse recommended).

SPEEDBALL 2

STEPHEN POOLE

This futuristic sports game from **Konami** can best be described as a brutal mix of indoor soccer, rugby, and *Rollerball*. Born as the result of a freak industrial accident and institutionalized to please a horde of bloodthirsty fans, the "sport" of Speedball is aptly named — the action here is so fast that it could leave your head spinning.

But success in *Speedball 2* doesn't hinge on how fast a trigger finger you have. There are plenty of strategic considerations to go along with the mayhem that takes place in the steel-lined Speedball arena. And it's the near-ideal mix of strategy and on-field carnage that makes *Speedball 2* one of the better PC sports games we've seen — so good, in fact, that it won a Game Players PC Excellence Award.

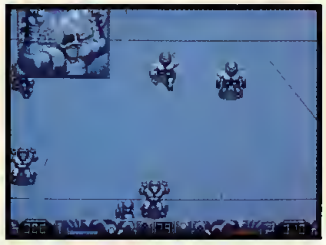
Each team is made up of nine players, divided into defensemen, midfielders, forwards, and a goalie. Although the steel ball is carried and thrown instead of being kicked, game play strongly resembles soccer — you're awarded 10 points for flinging the ball into your opponent's goal. If you score a goal after rolling the ball up a score multiplier ramp, you earn 15 points; roll it up the ramp twice, and goals are worth double their normal value.

But just as important as scoring is the punishment you dish out. Every time you tackle an opponent, you decrease his performance. And in a decided nod to the movie *Rollerball*, the speedball itself can be used as a weapon. Toss it against one of the four Electrobounce units on the field, and any opposing player you hit with it (or who even *touches* it) is knocked senseless.

Speedball 2 can be played by one or two players. In two-player mode, you can play a single game or a match (best of three or five). There are four types of one-player games: Practice, Knockout, Cup, and League. Practice lets your team hit the field alone so you can work on passing and shooting. In Knockout mode, you play progressively tougher teams until you lose. Cup is a single-elimination tourney involving all the teams in the league, and League play lets you undertake the rigors of a 14-game season.

Players are rated in eight categories which cover attributes such as aggression, speed, stamina, intelligence, throwing power, and so on. The team you've been assigned to manage, Brutal Deluxe, has abominably low rankings in all categories; but before each match you can upgrade your squad's abilities by using credits to buy better equipment. After you've spent your initial allotment, the only way to earn more credits is to grab coins that are scattered over the playing field.

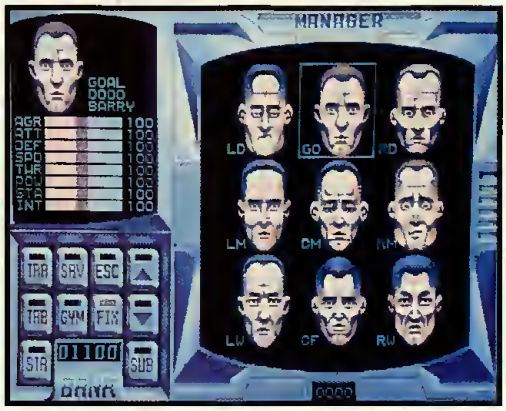
To give you a chance against the powerhouse teams you'll face before you've had a chance to stock up on credits, you can also pick up equipment during a match: run over the Boot icon, for example, and that



This sure ain't the "No Fun League" — each goal is followed by a shameless celebration.

player will have enhanced speed. There are also on-field tokens which have various effects on game play, from temporarily freezing the opposing team to giving you instant possession of the ball.

The only flaw we could find in *Speedball 2* was that you can't choose which player to control on defense. You automatically control the player closest to the ball, which can be maddening: just as the player you control is about to pick up a valuable item, a pass by the opposing team can cause control to suddenly switch to another player. You're consequently deprived of the power-up, and until you're aware control has changed you may head in the wrong direction. This gives the computer a decided advantage; after all, it has no trouble instantaneously switching between players.



The Manager Screen is where you buy equipment, trade players, and check out your next opponent.

But there's so much to enjoy here that it's easy to overlook this quirk. The action is *hot*, and the managerial decisions confronting you draw you into the game even more. There's plenty of replay value, thanks to the two-player option and the variety of one-player games. One warning, though: don't play *Speedball 2* without a joystick. Mastering an interface that uses *two* sets of directional keys for movement is about as easy as learning to play the harp.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA, EGA, or Tandy graphics; supports AdLib, Roland, and Tandy sound cards; joystick recommended.

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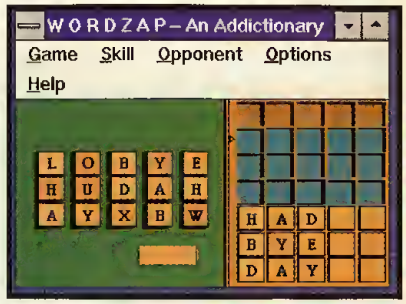

WordZap is an excellent and novel word game.

Following the success of *Microsoft Entertainment Pack* for Windows, the busy people in Redmond, Washington, have come out with two successors —*Microsoft Entertainment Pack, Volumes II and III*. And they are as visually sophisticated and as entertaining as the games in the first volume of this series.

Volume II contains six games plus IdleWild, a nice collection of screen-saver animations. There are two challenging versions of solitaire, FreeCell and Tut's Tomb. FreeCell is a pleasure to play because, unlike most solitaire games, there's very little luck involved.

Pack Two will probably be the youngsters' favorite.

Pipe Dream is a good version of the LucasFilm original, but its window is a bit small. For those who like jigsaw puzzles, JigSawed is a feature-packed simulation in which you can have your own pictures carved up and scrambled.

Pack Three is more adult-oriented, and contains arguably the best game.

RattlerRace is a version of the venerable snake-grows-longer arcade game. Stones is a simplified take-off on Mahjong, and Rodent's Revenge is an arcade-style chase game where you try to trap cats before they can eat you.

Volume III is the stronger of the two collections, at least for adults — it contains seven games and another collection of screen savers. And *Volume III* contains what is perhaps the standout game from either collection: Klotski, an import from Warsaw based on a traditional peasant game.

Although not the breakthrough that *Tetris* was, Klotski is well-suited to computerization. It's a complex, and fascinating, extension of a sliding-block puzzle in which you must maneuver a red block out of an enclosure. There are 24 separate puzzle variations, including a mind-bender named Sunshine for those players truly talented at spatial geometry.

Second runner-up is WordZap, a delightful scrambled-word challenge in which you play against the computer or a friend to create new words out of a jumble of letters. Life Genesis is a handsome version of the primitive computer simulation, Life. It's amusing for a few minutes. TetraVex is a timed brain-teaser in which you try to match tiles within a frame. SkiFree is a rather simple skiing simulation, but Fuji Golf — while no match for full-fledged golf games — provides a reasonable degree of challenge and realism. Finally, there's Tri-Peaks, yet another solitaire game.

Klotski—perhaps the finest game in either collection—is a real mind bender.

In TextraVex, you try to match all the letters.

What's recommended? *Volume II* is probably best for the younger crowd: it contains a fine jigsaw puzzle game, and three enjoyable arcade-style games. *Volume III*, though, has the excellent Klotski, plus a fine brain-teaser and a first-rate word game.

Although its window is rather small, Pipe Dream is still quite playable.

All the games, though, are sure to please somebody, and each benefits from this series' creative, glamorous design and effective use of color — well-shaded 3-D frames, subtle but lush gray-upon-gray metallic textures, neon tube piping, and other effects that will show off the visual beauty that Windows can bring to a computer.

GP

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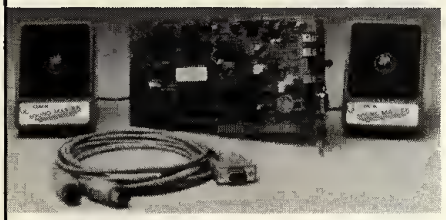

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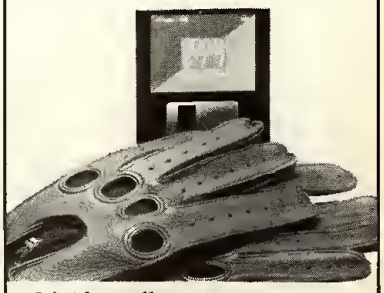

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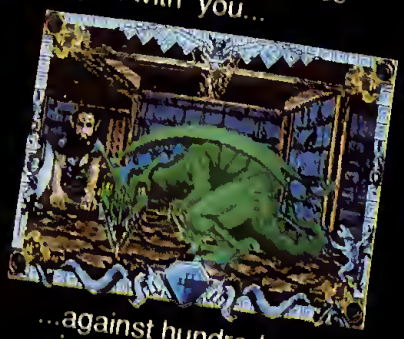

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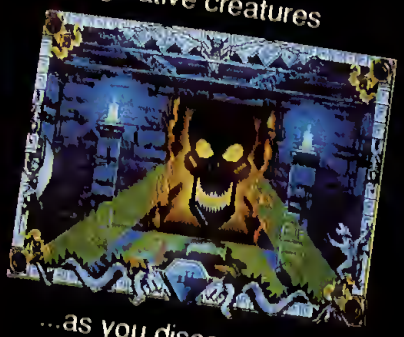

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